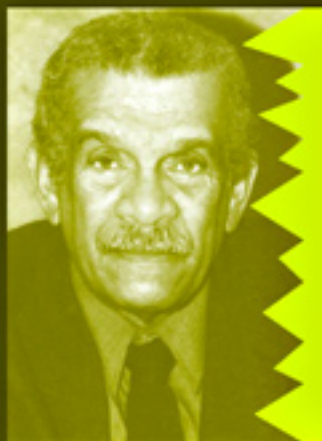


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DEREK WALCOTT

Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott is one of the Caribbean's most famous writers. His unique voice in poetry, drama and criticism is shaped by his position at the crossroads between Caribbean, British and American culture and by his interest in hybrid identities and diaspora. Edward Baugh's *Derek Walcott* analyses and evaluates Walcott's entire career over the last fifty years. Baugh guides the reader through the continuities and differences of theme and style in Walcott's poems and plays. Walcott is an avowedly Caribbean writer, acutely conscious of his culture and colonial heritage, but he has also made a lasting contribution to the way we read and value the western literary tradition. This comprehensive survey considers each of Walcott's published books, offering the most up-to-date guide available for students, scholars and readers of Walcott. Students of Caribbean and postcolonial studies will find this a perfect introduction to this important writer.

EDWARD BAUGH is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. He is the author of *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision: 'Another Life'* (1978) and the editor of *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (1978) and (with Colbert Nepaulsingh) of Derek Walcott's *Another Life* (2004).

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DEREK WALCOTT

EDWARD BAUGH

*Emeritus Professor of English
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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Chronology</i>	ix
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
1 Walcott, writing and the Caribbean: issues and directions	1
2 Connections and separations: from <i>25 Poems</i> to <i>The Gulf</i>	29
3 'What a man is': <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays</i> , <i>The Haitian Trilogy</i> and <i>Franklin</i>	57
4 'Is there that I born': <i>Another Life</i> , <i>Sea Grapes</i> , <i>The Star-Apple Kingdom</i>	88
5 The challenge of change: the dramatist after <i>Dream</i>	120
6 'Here' and 'Elsewhere', 'Word' and 'World': <i>The Fortunate Traveller</i> , <i>Midsummer</i> , <i>The Arkansas Testament</i>	153
7 Narrative variations: <i>Omeros</i> , <i>The Odyssey</i> , <i>The Bounty</i> , <i>Tiepolo's Hound</i>	185
8 Homecoming: <i>The Prodigal</i>	222
<i>Notes</i>	230
<i>Select bibliography</i>	242
<i>Index</i>	249

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to J. Michael Dash for having recommended that I do this book, and to Abiola Irele for his helpful advice and his surpassing patience.

Chronology

- 1930 Walcott and his twin brother, Roderick, born, Castries, St Lucia.
- 1931 Death of Walcott's father, Warwick Walcott.
- 1941–7 Walcott attends St Mary's College, Castries.
- 1944 Poem, '1944', published in *The Voice of St Lucia*.
- 1947–50 Assistant Master, St Mary's College.
- 1948 Publication of *25 Poems*, Walcott's first book.
- 1949 Publication of *Epitaph for the Young*.
- 1950 Founds St Lucia Arts Guild, with Maurice Mason.
Premiere of *Henri Christophe*, Castries.
Enters University College of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, on Colonial Development and Welfare scholarship, to read for BA degree in English, French and Latin.
- 1951 Publication of *Poems*.
- 1953 BA degree (London – University College of the West Indies).
- 1953–4 Reads for Diploma in Education, University College of the West Indies.
- 1954 First marriage, to Faye Moyston.
Premiere of *The Sea at Dauphin*, Port of Spain.
- 1954–7 Assistant Master, Grenada Boys' Secondary School, Grenada; St Mary's College, St Lucia; Jamaica College, Jamaica.
- 1957–8 Feature writer, *Public Opinion*, Jamaica.
- 1958 Premiere of *Drums and Colours*, Port of Spain, to mark inauguration of the Federation of the West Indies.
Premiere of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Port of Spain.

- 1959 Founds Little Carib Basement Theatre (later Trinidad Theatre Workshop).
Premiere of *Malcochon*, Castries.
- 1960 Second marriage, to Margaret Maillard.
- 1960–2 Feature writer, *Trinidad Guardian*.
- 1962 Federation of the West Indies dissolved.
- 1963–8 Drama critic, later freelance writer, *Trinidad Guardian*.
- 1964 Publication of *Selected Poems*.
- 1965 Publication of *The Castaway*.
- 1966 Establishes Basement Theatre at Bretton Hall Hotel, Port of Spain.
Death of Harold Simmons, friend and mentor.
Royal Society of Literature Award for *The Castaway*.
Elected Fellow of the Royal Society.
- 1967 Premiere of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Toronto.
- 1969 Publication of *The Gulf*.
Gold Hummingbird Medal, Trinidad and Tobago.
- 1970 Publication of *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*.
'The February [Black Power] Revolution', attempt to overthrow the government of Trinidad and Tobago.
Cholmondeley Award for Poetry, for *The Gulf*.
- 1971 Obie Award for most distinguished play on Off-Broadway (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*).
- 1972 Order of the British Empire (St Lucia List).
- 1973 Honorary Doctor of Letters, University of the West Indies.
Publication of *Another Life*.
- 1974 Jock Campbell New Statesman Award for *Another Life*.
Premiere of *The Joker of Seville*, Port of Spain.
- 1976 Resigns from Trinidad Theatre Workshop, of which he had been Director.
Publication of *Sea Grapes*.
Premiere of *O Babylon!*, Port of Spain.
Premiere of *Remembrance*, St Croix.
- 1978 Publication of '*The Joker of Seville*' and '*O Babylon!*'.
Premiere of *Pantomime*, Port of Spain.

- 1979 Honorary Member, American Academy of Arts and Letters.
Publication of *The Star-Apple Kingdom*.
- 1980 Publication of 'Remembrance' and 'Pantomime'.
- 1981 John D. and Catherine MacArthur Prize Fellow Award.
Publication of *The Fortunate Traveller*.
Premiere of *Beef, No Chicken*, Port of Spain.
- 1982 Appointed Visiting Professor of English (Creative Writing), Boston University.
Third marriage, to Norline Metivier.
- 1983 Premiere of *The Last Carnival*, Seattle.
Premiere of *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, Bridgetown.
- 1984 Publication of *Midsummer*.
Premiere of *The Haitian Earth*, Castries, to mark 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery.
- 1986 Gold Musgrave Medal, Institute of Jamaica (presented 1988).
Publication of *Three Plays*.
Publication of *Collected Poems*.
Appointed Professor of English (Creative Writing), Boston University.
- 1987 Publication of *The Arkansas Testament*.
- 1989 Awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry by Queen Elizabeth II.
Premiere of *The Ghost Dance*, Oneonta.
- 1990 Death of mother, Alix Walcott, Castries.
Publication of *Omeros*.
- 1991 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Medal.
W. H. Smith Award for *Omeros*.
- 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature.
Premiere of *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*, Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 1993 Publication of *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*.
Publication of *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (The Nobel Lecture) (London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).
Premiere of *Walker* (as an opera), Boston.

- Columbus Square, Castries, renamed Derek Walcott Square.
- 1996 Death of friend, Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Laureate, New York.
- 1997 Publication of *The Bounty*.
- 1998 Honorary Doctor of Letters, University of Warwick.
- 2000 Death of brother, Roderick, Toronto.
Publication of *Tiepolo's Hound*.
- 2002 Publication of *The Haitian Trilogy*.
Publication of 'Walker' and 'The Ghost Dance'.
- 2004 Publication of *The Prodigal*.
- 2005 The Pitons declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Abbreviations

Abbreviated references in the text are to the following editions of Walcott's work, a typescript by him and a collection of interviews with him. The initials given are followed by a page number, both in parentheses. Where a quotation is from a poem to be found in *Collected Poems* (CP), the reference is given as from CP.

- AT *The Arkansas Testament* (1987; London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988)
- B *The Bounty* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997)
- C *The Castaway and Other Poems* (London: Cape, 1965)
- CDW *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996)
- CP *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (1986; London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992)
- DMM *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970; London: Cape, 1972)
- EY *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Advocate Co., 1949)
- F *Franklin: A Tale of the Islands*, mimeograph typescript, n.d. (The University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Jamaica)
- FT *The Fortunate Traveller* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)
- G *The Gulf and Other Poems* (London: Cape, 1969)
- GN *In A Green Night: Poems 1948–1960* (London: Cape, 1962)
- HT *The Haitian Trilogy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002)

- I* *Ione: A Play with Music* (Kingston, Jamaica: University College of the West Indies, Extra-Mural Department (1957))
- JSB* *'The Joker of Seville' and 'O Babylon!'* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978)
- M* *Midsummer* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984)
- MS One* *'Another Life,'* unpublished holograph, University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Jamaica
- O* *Omeros* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990)
- OSV* *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993)
- P* *The Prodigal* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004)
- RP* *'Remembrance' and 'Pantomime'* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980)
- SAK* *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978)
- SG* *Sea Grapes* (London: Cape, 1976)
- TH* *Tiepolo's Hound* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000)
- TP* *Three Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986)
- WGD* *'Walker' and 'The Ghost Dance'* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002)
- WTS* *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)

CHAPTER I

Walcott, writing and the Caribbean: issues and directions

Derek Walcott's Nobel lecture, delivered at the high noon of his career, is a good vantage point from which to take a comprehensive look at his achievement. The lecture brings together virtually all the major concerns which have driven his work and shaped his idea of himself as a writer. It provides a conceptual framework within which to discuss the work, not only by the extent to which it confirms positions previously evident, but also by the extent to which it represents changes of emphasis. The concerns which it brings into focus have been central to debate about the nature and identity of Caribbean literature and culture. This interest is by no means parochial or limiting. For Walcott, to define himself as Caribbean man is to delineate a view of the world and to locate himself in the world.

These concerns include the legacy of Caribbean history, the effects of diaspora and the challenge of cultural fragmentation and diversity, the factors of class, race and language as cultural and artistic determinants, as well as the challenges of craft, to use a favourite word of his. Walcott's stature as a writer, as is the case with any great writer, is not just a function of his having an extraordinarily compelling way with words. It also rests on the fact that his work represents a considerable body of integrated ideas, some of which are additionally engaging or contentious because they are not afraid to go against the popular grain.

For anyone who attempts a commentary on Walcott's extensive range and output, a primary challenge is to bring his poetry and his plays into discursive relationship. He has excelled in both genres, and has been working in both from the beginning. By the time he was out of his teens, he had made a mark locally in both genres. His

subsequent achievement in either would be enough to ensure his status as a major writer. By and large, critics have tended to concentrate on one or other, and some to regard him as more accomplished in one than in the other.¹ In general, there has been more international critical attention given to the poetry than to the plays. On the other hand, by virtue of the appeal of production and the communal immediacy of theatre, the plays have tended to enjoy greater currency within the Caribbean.

Walcott sees himself as, essentially, the poet. He speaks out of a reverential belief in poetry as a well-nigh sacred vocation. Poetry cherishes 'occluded sanctities', '[p]laces as threatened by . . . prose as a headland is by the bulldozer or a sea-almond by the surveyor's string' (WTS, 82). But the Nobel lecture had opened with a theatrical image. It is the image of East Indian boys, on a Saturday afternoon, preparing to perform a 'dramatization of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*' (WTS, 65), on a field in the Trinidadian village of Felicity. The dramatizing of an epic – no doubt the most natural thing to do – is itself indicative of the original identification of drama with poetry. Walcott mentions that only recently he himself had adapted Homer's *Odyssey* for the stage. In his evocation of the event at Felicity, the dramatic sweep of the scene is suffused with lyrical feeling.

Interviewers have raised with Walcott the question of the relationship between his poetry and his plays. In his answers, he has remarked the common ground of the two, as well as their differences and complementarity.² A poet for whom metaphor is the source and being of poetry, he sees a play as poetry in that it is metaphoric in conception and staging, in the action and in the characters no less than in the quality of its language: 'In theatre we see this metaphor as a human being. The metaphor of *Dream* was, for me, an old man who looked like an ape, and above his shoulder, a round white full moon' (CDW, 38).

However, despite such identification of drama with poetry, it is also true that the two genres satisfy in Walcott different, complementary impulses, needs, talents. His poetry, notwithstanding its narrative and even epic interest, and its engagement with large social concerns, speaks primarily in a personal, lyrical voice. In the plays, notwithstanding some autobiographical material, especially in the

later work, the author's personal voice is submerged in the voices of his characters. For instance, whereas in the poetry he speaks *for* and *about* the folk, the unlettered fisherman and charcoal burner, for 'Mass Man' (*CP*, 99), in the plays he lets them speak for themselves and express their communal predicament and vibrancy more or less in their own terms.

'The theatre', Walcott tells David Montenegro in 1987, 'gives you satisfactions that poetry might not, or allows certain parts of your voice to express themselves that poetry does not' (*CDW*, 144). In his essay 'What the Twilight Says', the introduction to *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970), he had spoken about the split within his creative consciousness between 'the interior life of poetry [and] the outward life of action and dialect' (*WTS*, 4). The latter he equated with the theatre. While Walcott speaks of his poetry, in contrast to his plays, as representing an 'interior life', and as seeking to be '*quietly* accurate' (*CDW*, 58; my emphasis) in doing so, he also advocates, in an interview with Nancy Schoenberger (1983), the idea of poetry as public, bardic performance – 'it has to do with recitation as an idea; it has to do with memory and metre' (*CDW*, 94). The seeming contradiction here – poetry as interior life and as public performance at one and the same time – may perhaps be understood as expressing the idea of fusing poetry and drama, of realizing the ways in which each is energized by the other: 'I have a belief that a poet is instinctively closer to the theatre than a novelist or fiction writer because, structurally, the feel of the poem is the feel of a play, or the feel of a play is like a very large poem' (*CDW*, 92). Again, 'it works both ways: the lyric impulse generally needs to be fortified by dramatic experience, and the reverse should be true' (*CDW*, 93).

Whatever truth there may be in Walcott's claim that 'a poet is instinctively closer to the theatre than a novelist', one must remember that a significant feature of his poetry has been the way in which it has sought to incorporate certain qualities of prose fiction. In a 1992 interview with Rebekah Presson, he acknowledges the dramatic factor in his poem *Omeros*, and then says, 'In a large poem, though, the writing is like a novel, and as in a novel, everything is in there – geographic description, the weather, the characters, and the action, and so on' (*CDW*, 190).

When J. P. White observes that in his plays Walcott is 'more clearly funny, satirical, angry, bawdy, tender and loving than in the poems' (CDW, 170), Walcott seems to sense in the remark a preference for the plays as being more congenial and accommodating. In a different context, he might well have responded by calling attention to the funny, satirical, tender and loving, if not bawdy, moments in his poetry. However, he accepts White's distinction and proceeds to justify it by way of an argument that constitutes not only a defence of poetry, but also an assertion of its superiority to drama. He becomes caught up in the twists and turns of arguing that poetry goes beyond comedy and tragedy because it has 'the quality of the sublime': 'Ultimately tragedy, when compared to poetry, is a farce' (CDW, 170). What redeems the farcical in tragedy, in *Othello*, in *Oedipus*, is what is achieved through the poetry: the sublime.

Walcott then virtually does a volte-face, when he considers the West Indian situation: 'On the other hand, however, in terms of being West Indian, this idea can almost be contradicted' (CDW, 171). He seems to suggest that, in the Caribbean, whatever he has been calling the sublime will necessarily have something comic, even farcical about it. This is because of the nature of Caribbean artistic expression as shaped by Caribbean history. He adverts to 'African melodies', Gospel music and calypso: 'The ritualistic thing in Calypso is comic in its drive, even if you have a tragic content. Now that is what I would like to accomplish. I won't consider myself to be a fulfilled West Indian artist until I have written something in poetry with that kind of spirit' (CDW, 171). We seem to have come round to the idea that the ideal is a fusion of the poetry and drama, the lyric and the dramatic impulses, the quiet, interior voice and the public, performing voice.

At this point it might be appropriate to note that contradiction and paradox are characteristic features of Walcott's thought. They constitute the burden of Victor D. Questel's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 'Derek Walcott: Contradiction and Resolution: Paradox, Inconsistency, Ambivalence and their Resolution in Derek Walcott's Writings 1946-75'.³ Questel's title in itself seems to imply that paradox and contradiction ought necessarily to be resolved. While

some of the contradictions in Walcott's thought may indeed be a matter of straightforward inconsistency, or change of mind, or perhaps even confusion, it is also true that with Walcott paradox and contradiction are rhetorical features, indicating a way of seeing and a view of life and of 'truth'. They are aspects of that creative 'schizophrenia' which he has cultivated.⁴ Born in January, he says in *Another Life*, 'my sign was Janus, / I saw with twin heads, / and everything I say is contradicted' (*CP*, 281).

The apparent fondness for paradox and contradiction is one aspect of the the self-image that Walcott projects and pursues. His poetry especially is an imaginative self-exploration and self-creation, a fiction and drama of himself. This writing of the self involves a process of self-address and self-interrogation. This pursuit is not ego-centricity or self-indulgent display of personal angst. It is Walcott's way of engaging with the world, by examining himself-in-the-world. The general sense in which the poet enters the fictive construct and unfolding story which is his poetry is instanced, for example, in the way in which he enters, as a character, the narrative fiction *Omeros*.

The poet's construction of himself as a character in a fiction is related to his interest in the interplay and fusion of genres and modes mentioned earlier. A major, pathfinding example in this regard is the poem *Another Life* (1973), which is at the same time an autobiography and a novel of sorts. Significantly, in the original manuscript out of which the poem emerged, Walcott seems to see all genres, except perhaps drama, as modes of autobiography: 'Those who have abandoned poetry for other forms of autobiography like fiction, the long essay and the travel book will remain split down the middle, petrified and Janus-headed' (*MS One*, 39). Autobiography is a form of fiction: 'All autobiographies should be in the third person . . . Henceforth "I" should be known as "him" – an object distant enough to regard dispassionately' (*MS One*, 9). As he was to write decades later, in *The Bounty*, 'I myself am a fiction' (*B*, 50). Walcott's work as a whole, including even the drama to varying degrees, may be regarded, then, as one continuing fiction, a story whose protagonist is the poet-persona, a 'character' who is gradually being discovered and created through various metamorphoses,

contradictions and continuities, but who is not necessarily recognizable at any given moment as the D. Walcott whom one might meet in the flesh. The idea of the fiction of self, of one's life and writing as being a striving towards the realization of an idea of oneself, not only informs much of Walcott's poetry; it is explicitly stated in the portrayal of some of his characters. In 'Koenig of the River', the protagonist, Koenig, becomes aware of himself as a character out of fiction: 'he felt bodiless, like a man stumbling from / the pages of a novel' (*CP*, 380). In *Another Life*, after sketching some of the minor characters of the world of his childhood, he sums up: 'the fiction of their own lives claimed each one' (*CP*, 181). This idea, of the individual being taken over by his fiction of self, takes on a suggestion of danger when Walcott observes, 'A writer can get trapped in his own image: look what it did to Hemingway' (*CDW*, 29). There may be a sub-text of typical Walcott self-knowledge here.

The idea of the life as an unfolding narrative which gives shape and significance to that life is underscored by the fact that the persona not only looks backwards at times, as in *Another Life*, to confront the idea of the young self out of which he has evolved, but also projects an image and idea of a future self which he thinks or hopes he is growing towards. In *Midsummer* (1984), past and future images of self neatly cohere in a moment which encompasses the whole narrative of the life:

Sometimes the flash is seen, a sudden exultation
of lightning fixing earth in its place; the asphalt's skin
smells freshly of childhood in the drying rain.
Then I believe that it is still possible, the happiness
of truth, and the young poet who stands in the mirror
smiles with a nod. He looks beautiful from this distance.
And I hope I am what he saw, an enduring ruin. (*M*, 23)

The image with which the Nobel lecture ends – the transfiguring memory of the moment 'when a boy [Walcott's young self] opened an exercise book and . . . framed stanzas that might contain the light of the hills' (*TWS*, 84) – is another instance of the 'closing', the engagement of 'I' and 'he'.

Midsummer is itself a version of the fiction of self, never mind its explicit lyric-meditative mode. And when, in the middle of that

work, Walcott speaks punningly of it as 'leaves that keep trying to summarize ["summerize"] my life' (*M*, 40), we recognize, under the whimsy, a significant definition of his entire output. An even more definitive enactment of the idea of the fiction of self, and a landmark moment in this fiction as process, is the narrative poem 'The Schooner *Flight*'. It is the self-portrait and life-summary of its narrator-protagonist, the sailor-poet Shabine, another Walcott mask. At the poem's open end, Shabine projects into the future an idea of himself which is another version of the 'enduring ruin', the 'old poet, / facing the wind / and nothing, which is, / the loud world in his mind' (*CP*, 290):

My first friend was the sea. Now, is my last.
I stop talking now. I work, then I read,
cotching under a lantern hooked to the mast.
I try to forget what happiness was . . . (*CP*, 361).

Such variations on the stoical, dispassionate bardic figure, seasoned by passion and experience, oracular in his silence, are a fulfilment of the idea of the mind which 'enspheres all circumstance', as imaged in the 'strange, cyclic chemistry' of the orange tree in the title poem of *In A Green Night* (1962). All the opposites are held in the harmonious yet dynamic tension which is the paradox of life. The power of mind, its capacity to sustain and to renew man, is a leading theme in Walcott. Emotion makes us human; mind ennobles us. As he prays at the end of 'Crusoe's Island', 'may the mind / Catch fire till it cleaves / Its mould of clay at last' (*CP*, 71).

The circumstance, multifarious and contradictory, which the mind seeks to ensphere – the 'nothing, which is [everything], / [which is] the loud world in [his] mind' (*CP*, 290) – is comprehended by Walcott under the aspect of Caribbean experience, which is to say Caribbean history. His work is driven by a keen sense of that history. The Nobel lecture, like all of Walcott, is instinct with a sense of the West Indian past. At the same time, it brings to yet another climax his obsessive quarrel with history.⁵ The lecture moves to the rhythm of a solemn joy, an elation (another favourite Walcott word) that celebrates the endurance and creativity of a people in spite of a history that, in some eyes, seemed to have

doomed them to blight. 'At last, islands not written about, but writing themselves!' (WTS, 78). Walcott accepts the Nobel prize in the name of the place and the people, seeing himself as but representative of their endurance and creativity. The elation to which the lecture moves is a reproof to what he calls 'the sigh of History', with which the lecture contends. Watching the 'arrowing flocks of scarlet ibises' coming in at evening over the Caroni Swamp to 'cover an islet until it turned into a flowering tree', and connecting them with the scarlet costumes of the boy archers performing the *Ramleela*, Walcott remarks: 'The sigh of History meant nothing here. These two visions, the *Ramleela* and the arrowing flocks of scarlet ibises, blent into a single gasp of gratitude. Visual surprise is natural in the Caribbean; it comes with the landscape, and faced with its beauty, the sigh of History dissolves' (WTS, 68).

The challenge of coming to terms with West Indian history assumed particular, acute significance for West Indian writers of Walcott's generation. The issue found a natural point of focus in the nineteenth-century British historian James Anthony Froude's scathing assessment of the West Indies, in his *The English in the West Indies; or The Bow of Ulysses* (1887). Froude's assessment was revived and reworked by V. S. Naipaul in his *Middle Passage* (1962) to the now infamous conclusion, 'History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.'⁶ The echo of that 'nothing' still reverberates in West Indian literature, although writers of later generations have been less and less exercised about it. Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, all have explicitly addressed the charge of nothingness. 'Nothing' has been a central theme in Walcott.⁷ He has sought to transform it imaginatively from a stigma of non-achievement and hopelessness to an inviting challenge and opportunity, a blank page on which there is everything to be written. The provenance of this 'nothing' must also acknowledge the French-Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire, who claimed a future for 'those who never tamed steam or electricity / those who did not explore sea or sky / . . . / those who knew of voyages only when uprooted'.⁸

The 'nothing' of the Froude-Naipaul nexus has persisted in Walcott as a catalyst for his ideas about cultural and artistic creativity in the West Indies. In 'What the Twilight Says' he addressed

directly the passage from Froude which Naipaul had used as the epigraph to *The Middle Passage*. The quarrel resonated through Walcott's 1974 essays 'The Muse of History' and 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' And now, in the Nobel lecture, Froude is still on his mind, as he goes back to the very same passage, when he speaks of 'the way the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimized, rootless, mongrelized. "No people there," to quote Froude, "in the true sense of the word." No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken' (WTS, 67-8).⁹

Exercised by this anxiety about history, Walcott developed the idea of going beyond history, of transcending it. The idea had its most sustained expression in 'The Muse of History', 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' and in *Another Life*, but it had begun to be forcefully articulated quite a bit earlier, notably in a 1964 newspaper article entitled 'A Dilemma Faces W[est] I[ndian] Artists': 'Decadence begins when a civilization falls in love with its ruins. Those who claim that there is no sense of history in the West Indies, that its peoples are without that sense of the past which fertilizes art as tough weeds fertilize a ruin, suffer from a longing for that decadence.'¹⁰ The idea of going beyond history revalued the stigma of 'nothing' that history had supposedly inflicted on Caribbean man, and made it his very ground of possibility. So, the 'deep, amnesiac blow' that had 'cleft the brain' (CP, 88) was no longer a cause for hopelessness and despair. 'Amnesia' now became a privileged concept. The loss of what had been lost, and lost to memory, in the sea-crossings, should be accepted joyfully. West Indian man could be Adamic, if he freed his mind of the baggage of history and the awe of history. Adam had no history, and all the world to name. In this theory, the history that was being transcended was history conceived of as linear, a time-bound chain of cause and effect, abuse and recrimination, the worship of fact and historical time, 'the sugarcane factory's mechanization of myth / ground into rubbish' (CP, 287). This worship involved a 'vision of man' as 'a creature chained to the past', rather than as an 'elemental' being 'inhabited by presences' (WTS, 37). Walcott argued that the true New World writers will 'reject the idea of history as time for its original concept as myth, the partial recall of the race. For them history is fiction, subject to the fitful

muse, memory. Their philosophy, based on a contempt for historic time, is revolutionary, for what they repeat to the New World is its simultaneity with the Old' (*WTS*, 37).

So Walcott arrives at an intendedly revolutionary position: 'In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered. What has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention.'¹¹ Naipaul had written: 'In West Indian towns history seems dead, irrelevant.'¹² Now, Walcott takes the baleful 'reality' of the Naipaulian 'irrelevant' and turns it into a virtue. But Walcott's ostensibly radical position, more radical than that of the conventionally radical, might appear heretical, or a clever disguise under which to maintain a conservative and accommodating stance towards the abuses of history. It might seem like yet another evasion of history.

However, there is really no denial of the past in Walcott. He has returned again and again to recognition of what survived, and more substantially so in his later work. His work is instinct with a sense of the past and is in large measure a complex, sometimes paradoxical negotiation with the past. We can trace this negotiation from, say, the early historical drama *Henri Christophe* (1950) and the 'epic drama' *Drums and Colours* (first produced 1958) and the dramatic fable *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (also first produced 1958), a succinct replay of, and disquisition on West Indian history, to a much later play like *A Branch of the Blue Nile*. This last-named, while not being an historical drama as such, is resonant with a sense of West Indian history, a resonance eloquently articulated from the point of view of the self-interest of one of the characters. Of the countless poems one might refer to as enacting the confrontation with history and as acknowledging the past, even while Walcott is otherwise expounding a theory of history as irrelevant, one might appropriately choose 'Mass Man' and 'The Almond Trees'. The latter, which will be discussed in chapter 2, comes to terms with the supposed absence of history in the Caribbean.

In 'Mass Man', the poet-persona is watching the masqueraders doing the road march in the Trinidad Carnival. He sees ordinary, ostensibly insignificant people transforming their lives for a moment through costumes which represent power and splendour. One, a

man called Boysie, a pointedly ironic name in the circumstances, is playing a famous historical figure, Cleopatra. The poet-persona seems to impute a naive lack of self-awareness to the revellers. Just then, he sees a child-reveller, dressed in a bat costume, who, overcome by the 'whirlwind' pace of the adults, 'collapses, sobbing' (CP, 99). The child may be read as the emergent West Indies. Its sobbing and the ominous bat image represent the dark obverse of the revelry. The revellers are in effect seeking to escape from their history, while failing to see how much they and their escapism are products of that history. Their innocence is innocence of history. The poet-persona's answer to their challenge – "Oh God, child, you can't dance?" (CP, 99) – is really addressed to himself and to the audience, as a comment on the revellers. It shows his pained awareness of the history of which they are oblivious, and which is the sub-text of the revelry:

But I am dancing, look, from an old gibbet
my bull-whipped body swings, a metronome!
Like a fruit bat dropped in the silk-cotton's shade,
My mania, my mania is a terrible calm. (CP, 99)

Here again is the trope of madness identified with West Indian history. The poet-persona relives the trauma of the past ('old gibbet'), of slavery as recollected in the images of the body of the slave, bull-whipped and lynched on a silk-cotton tree, a tree traditionally said to be haunted by the ghosts of dead slaves. When, in the final stanza, the poet-persona says, as if addressing the revellers, the masses, 'some skull [on Ash Wednesday] must rub its memory with ashes' (CP, 19), he is again asserting the necessity of the painful look back into the terrible past. The idea is extended, with variation, in the line 'some hand must crawl and *recollect* your rubbish' (CP, 99; my emphasis). Here is the figure of history, West Indian history, as rubbish heap – 'the intolerable pile which they called history',¹³ to quote the young protagonist of Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*.

In his idea of going beyond history, or of history as irrelevant, Walcott was positing a caveat against making too much depend on historical exhumation and assertion, against becoming caught in 'the mere repetition of human error which passes for history'.¹⁴

The metaphor which seems best to hold in balance the contradictions and complexities in Walcott's idea of transcending history is the bonfire metaphor in his paper 'The Figure of Crusoe'. It incorporates and metamorphoses the idea of history as rubbish heap, as well as the idea of Caribbean man as castaway. Walcott imagines Crusoe, mask of the West Indian person, as

a lonely man on a beach who has heaped a pile of dead bush, twigs, etc., to make a bonfire. [On this bonfire] he keeps throwing twigs, dead thoughts, fragments of memory, all the used parts of his life, to keep his contemplation pure and bright . . .¹⁵

Crusoe's triumph . . . is the cynical answer that we must make to those critics who complain that there is nothing here, no art, no history, no architecture, by which they mean ruins, in short, no civilization, it is 'O happy desert!' We live not only on happy, but on fertile deserts . . . We contemplate our spirit by the detritus of the past.¹⁶

It is not history (what happened) with which Walcott quarrels, but rather certain ways in which men have tended to use and abuse the idea of history. The distinction becomes clear in the Nobel lecture, in the way in which Walcott moves between 'history' and 'History'. His quarrel has been primarily with the latter, which is an ideological construct that has served the purposes of a colonial discourse. The distinction is nicely enacted when Walcott begins a sentence thus: 'There was this conviction in Froude that since History is based on achievement, and since the history of the Antilles was genetically corrupt' (WTS, 76). So he speaks of 'the history of the Antilles' as 'given' (WTS, 78), and of 'our shattered histories' (WTS, 69). On the other hand, he says that the 'sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes' (WTS, 68). Commenting on his initial, conditioned response to the performance of the *Ramleela* at Felicity, he says: 'I misread the event through a visual echo of History – the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples, and trumpeting elephants – when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation, delight in the boys' screams, in the sweets-stalls, in more and more costumed characters appearing; a delight of conviction, not loss' (WTS, 67).

'Not loss'. Interestingly enough, or surprisingly, depending on one's point of view, Walcott, having worked out his history-as-amnesia theory, having privileged the 'nothing' which may be made

into something, now comes round to stressing not loss but survival. The word 'amnesia' occurs only once in the Nobel lecture, and in a sentence in which it is more than balanced by the idea of the virtue in the effort of memory, and the idea of the 'fragments of memory' as stubborn, redeeming survivals: 'All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, *arcs-en-ciel*. That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding the gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase' (WTS, 82). In 'What the Twilight Says', 'the old gods were dying in the mouths of the old, [and] they died of their own volition' (WTS, 7). 'Ogun was an exotic for us, not a force' (WTS, 8). In 'Laventille', 'We left somewhere a life we never found, / customs and gods that are not born again' (CP, 88).

Now, in the Nobel lecture, the 'fragments of memory' that constituted the 'detritus of the past', and which the Crusoe figure had to burn in his purgatorial bonfire, become re-visioned, *Fragments of Epic Memory*, which fragments, lovingly pieced together, constitute the re-membering of something new and strong out of the shattered past. Now the word is 'survival', whose engine is

that self-astonishing, elemental force, [man's] mind. That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong. They survived the Middle Passage and the *Fatel Rozack*, the ship that carried the first indentured Indians from the port of Madras to the cane fields of Felicity, that carried the chained Cromwellian convict and the Sephardic Jew, the Chinese grocer and the Lebanese merchant selling cloth samples on his bicycle. (WTS, 70-1)

The distinction and relationship between history and History are played out in 'The Schooner *Flight*'. He tells of an encounter with History, personified humorously but in a manner that shows how the sense of overbearing History is informed by the actuality of West Indian history:

I met History once, but he ain't recognize me,
a parchment Creole, with warts
like an old sea bottle . . .

I confront him and shout, 'Sir, is Shabine!
 They say I'se your grandson. You remember Grandma,
 your black cook, at all?' The bitch hawk and spat.
 A spit like that worth any number of words.
 But that's all them bastards have left us: words. (*CP*, 350)

Shabine, product of history, child of History, is denied by History. 'Bastard' is ironic, and perhaps an unwitting point of counter-discourse on Shabine's part, since *he* is supposed to be, both literally and figuratively, the bastard, the non-person. 'Bastard' connects with the old fisherman's mongrel in 'The Almond Trees,' with the idea, sarcastically repeated in the Nobel lecture, of the West Indian people as mongrelized, and with the black mongrel of *Tiepolo's Hound*.

In the Nobel lecture, Walcott, contemplating 'the proportions of the ideal Caribbean city' (*WTS*, 73), proposes that 'it would be so racially various that the cultures of the world – the Asiatic, the Mediterranean, the European, the African – would be represented in it . . . Its citizens would intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition, until their children found it increasingly futile to trace their genealogy' (*WTS*, 74). This no doubt utopian model is part of Walcott's vision of what the Caribbean has to offer to the world. It is modelled particularly on the ethnic variety of Port of Spain, which Walcott extols, and more generally on that of the Caribbean as a whole. In its valorizing of hybridity and miscegenation, it signals Walcott's antipathy to any kind of racial, ethnic or cultural purism. It stands on its head the deep-seated horror of miscegenation, which had been an important factor in colonialist discourse, a horror explicitly articulated by writers such as Froude and Edward Long.¹⁷ When Walcott says that to Froude 'the history of the Antilles was . . . genetically corrupt' (*WTS*, 76), 'genetically' may easily be read as being only metaphorical. But the possible literal exactness of the term should not be ignored, the inevitable link in the mind of someone like Froude between the lack of 'achievement' and the fact of miscegenation.

What Froude and Long see as genetic degeneration, biologically and culturally, Walcott rereads as a dynamic cultural freshness and energy in the interplay of fragmented racial and ethnic identities.

Just as Walcott advocates going 'past the confrontation of history' (WTS, 36), so he advocates going past racial self-consciousness and racial self-assertion, and argues that race should not be an important factor in art: 'I don't think there is any such thing as a black writer or a white writer. Ultimately, there is someone whom one reads' (CDW, 47). This position is arguable. Anyway, just as history, in his view, is irrelevant in the Caribbean, so '[t]he question of emphasizing an African or Indian identity is irrelevant' (CDW, 75). However, despite this controversial view, he does not deny the 'fact' of race. He regards the irrelevance of emphasizing racial identity as following from the fact that 'you are African or you are Indian and no one can take that away in terms of identity' (CDW, 75). In response to the probing of Daryl Dance about his treatment of the theme of race in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and 'What the Twilight Says', and about his attitude towards his own mixed racial ancestry, he insists that race is of no great moment to him personally. Yet at one point in the Dance interview, he intimates that if he is not being as informative as he might be about his racial history, his reticence comes out of consideration for the possible sensitivity of other members of his family.

At the beginning of the first manuscript version of *Another Life*, Walcott speaks of 'the ineradicable longing of my generation, a nostalgia that I was fed by teachers and pastors, what [Salvador de] Madariaga once named 'a yearning for whiteness' (*MS One*, 3). He continues:

I was born 'European', and it has taken me this long to learn the bitterness of parody. I do not regret painting or hoping I would paint a bush of 'fatpokes' or almond trees wrestling themselves as if they were the cypresses of Van Gogh any more than I regret my faith whose God was, it was blasphemy to conceive otherwise, immaculately white, white bearded, pink white skin, white haired as an old cloud. Whiteness was the colour of wisdom and of higher things, and it was the duty of every Christian, colonial child to achieve it, at least in spirit. . . . (*MS One*, 3)

The connection between race, colour and culture is clearly accepted in such a statement. So when Walcott says, much later, that there is no 'such thing as a black writer or a white writer', or that 'there's no need to give the Muse any particular colour'¹⁸ (this in relation to his

having posited a white Muse in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*), he is in effect contesting a position that he himself had internalized as intimately as anyone else.

Walcott's sharp reaction to black self-assertion and protest in the early 1970s, in essays like 'What the Twilight Says' and 'The Muse of History', was not simply a counter-product of the revolutionary mood of the time.¹⁹ The groundwork may be seen in his newspaper articles and book reviews from the early 1960s. In 1963 he welcomed Denis Williams' novel *Other Leopards* under the caption 'His Is the Pivotal One About Race', warming to its sympathetically ironic treatment of the identity crisis of a West Indian in the Sudan. The review begins by referring to an exchange of letters about the African personality, between Williams and A. J. Seymour, editor of *Kyk-over-al*, which had appeared in that journal some time earlier. Walcott observes with approval that Williams' letters 'were without racial nostalgia'.²⁰ He goes on to say that 'on a large scale' West Indian racial nostalgia is 'tragic', but that it 'has had the dimension of tragic farce in the Back to Africa exodus of [Marcus] Garvey, and in the violent insurrection of Jamaica's Rastafarians'.²¹ The judgement on Garvey and the Rastafarians is not well informed, and he would subsequently modify his view of the Rastafarians. What is more immediately germane here is that the statement as a whole is indicative of Walcott's commitment to the idea of the Caribbean as home for Caribbean people, and to the idea of Caribbeanness as a viable condition for a distinctive, nurturing and sustainable culture.

A few months after the Williams review, Walcott published 'Necessity of Negritude',²² an article in tribute to Leopold Senghor, on the occasion of a state visit by Senghor to Trinidad and Tobago.

The review begins with the suggestion that the Negritude movement emerged, indeed had to emerge, as a response to the white world's deafness to the literature of blacks. This deafness was rationalized by 'a concept of language and literature as being white that on one hand divides writers racially . . . and which on the other claims that art is universal'.²³ Walcott argued that the white world's mistake was countered by an understandable but also unfortunate insistence on blackness and black exclusiveness. This insistence has helped entrench racial divisiveness: 'The division has spread to

popular art forms like jazz, which is now exclusively claimed by the American Negro as his "soul music," and it is an assertion that has impelled a great deal of "separatist" poetry.²⁴ The crucial word here is 'exclusively', but the statement might seem in effect to minimize the identification of jazz with its sources in black culture and history.

The idea of racial difference as a factor of poetics is at issue here. Walcott notes, with obvious disapproval, 'A great deal of modern Negro poetry and prose belligerently asserts its isolation, its difference, and sometimes its psychic superiority.'²⁵ The rejection of an aesthetics of racial difference is repeated even more strongly in 'The Muse of History', when Walcott refers to 'the old separate-but-equal argument. Blacks are different, and the pathos is that most blacks have been led to believe this, and into the tragedy of proclaiming their difference' (WTS, 55). A danger inherent in this assertion of difference is that it is taken as being of itself a guarantee of artistic quality, and here the old issue of universalism is renewed: 'Bad verse written by blacks is better than good verse written by whites, because, say the revolutionaries, the same standards do not apply' (WTS, 55). Of course, the artistic quality of any given piece of verse written by a black poet does not in itself prove or disprove the validity of the notion of an aesthetics of racial difference. But Walcott is willing to find that technical advancement is difficult in poetry which seeks to be wholly 'black', for 'it is extremely difficult to create a natural poetry that is technically identifiable as Negro without distorting language or feeling, and most Negro poets writing in English arrive at a point where to progress technically, to develop complexity of structure appears like treachery, a betrayal of the cause'.²⁶ This pronouncement may raise as many questions as it answers. The second part of the statement is not proof of the first. In any event, the statement does not claim to be absolute – 'extremely difficult', but not impossible; 'most', not all.

It is not that Walcott altogether denies an aesthetics of difference, or even of racial difference. The difference of the West Indian writer lies in his West Indianness, and West Indianness is defined in terms of racial variety and admixture. So, Walcott complains, with a note of personal aggrievement: 'For purity, then,

for pure black Afro-Aryanism, only the unsoiled black is valid, and West Indianism is a taint, and other strains adulterate him. The extremists, the purists, are beginning to exercise those infections, so that a writer of 'mixed', hence 'degenerate' blood can be nothing stronger than a liberal' (*WTS*, 56). This West Indian identity, which constitutes a new beginning in a New World, is itself the accident or gift of history:

For us, whose tribal memories have dried, and who have begun again in a New World, Negritude offers an assertion of pride, but not of our complete identity, since that is mixed and shared by other races, whose writers are East Indian, white, mixed, whose best painters are Chinese, and in whom the process of racial assimilation goes on with every other marriage.²⁷

It is not surprising then that Walcott should disagree with those who claim that Caribbean cultural and artistic 'tradition is wholly [or, presumably, primarily] African and that its responses are alerted through the nostalgia of one race' (*WTS*, 54).²⁸ For Walcott, 'The problem is to recognize our African origins but not to romanticize them' (*CDW*, 18). Given his approving emphasis on the multi-racial, multi-ethnic composition of Caribbean people, Walcott will nevertheless say that they are 'African-sourced people' (*CDW*, 46), and that 'There is no West Indian who is black, or even one who is not black, who is not aware of Africa in all of us' (*CDW*, 56). When he says in the Nobel lecture that 'even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory' (*WTS*, 81), this sounds far enough from the earlier creative insistence on 'amnesia'. In any event, whatever the turns of his theoretical statements on the African factor in Caribbean culture, it is remarkable how much his later work has acknowledged the black African Caribbean person deprived by history – from *Omeros* to *Tiepolo's Hound* and *The Prodigal*, and including the play *Walker* – so much so that Isidore Okpewho can say that 'Walcott has . . . come to recognize the primacy of the African factor in Caribbean identity.'²⁹

In Walcott's work the issue of class is to a great extent subsumed in the issues of race and colour. In the West Indies, it is often arguable whether a given social problem is a matter of class or of colour, the two being historically so closely linked. The class distinction

between Shabine's white Creole grandfather, in his tropical patrician garb, and Shabine's grandmother, who had been his grandfather's black cook, is clear enough, and Shabine himself addresses his grandfather from across the class divide. On the other hand, Walcott appears to be looking self-consciously and somewhat uneasily in the opposite direction across the divide, when he recalls his brother and himself, as children, looking out of their bedroom window and hearing 'the native beat' of the street:

Yet, like the long, applauded note, joy soared further from two pale children staring from their upstairs window, wanting to march with that ragged, barefooted crowd, but who could not because they were not black and poor, until for one of them, watching the shouting, limber congregation, that difference became a sadness, that sadness rage, and that longing to share their lives ambition . . . (WTS, 19-20).

This longing has remained a dynamic of Walcott's work.

Walcott also acknowledges education as a factor in the class distinctions of West Indian society and, by implication, in his sense of some uneasiness in his own position in the society. Speaking to Charles H. Rowell of the system of British colonial education in the West Indies, he says that it created an elite (CDW, 125); and to Sharon Ciccarelli, he says: 'The society is still patterned on the stratification between rich and poor black. He who has acquired education finds himself on the thin line of the split in society. . . At the same time that one's intellect becomes refined, and one learns more about the society, there is a movement away from that society' (CDW, 39-40).

The sense of difference, the sadness, the rage and the longing have remained a plangent chord in Walcott's writing. It is there, for instance, in the radiant gravity of a later poem like 'The Light of the World' (AT, 48-51), where the distance between the poet and the beautiful black girl of whom he sings is perhaps more a matter of class than of anything else. In urging a comparison between the two French-Caribbean poets Aimé Césaire and St John Perse, Walcott acknowledges the differences between them, including the difference of class, but his purpose is to minimize these differences in comparison with what he sees as their similarities. So, he remarks cynically, 'to celebrate Perse, we might be told, is to celebrate the old plantation system, to celebrate the *bequé*, or plantation rider, verandas and

mulatto servants, a white French language in a white pith helmet, to celebrate a rhetoric of patronage and hauteur' (WTS, 78).

The explicit mention of class in, say, 'Laventille' ('in the flat, coloured city, class // lay escalated into structures still, / merchant, middleman, magistrate, knight' (CP, 86)) is atypical. *The Last Carnival* does dramatize the effects of the class structure of the society it depicts. Still, Walcott's sustained compassion for 'the black, the despairing, the poor' (CP, 29) does not invest in seeing them as victims of a system of entrenched class interests, or in seeing any real change in their situation as necessitating a dismantling of the system. In response to a comment that in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Makak's achievement does not involve any change in his material circumstances and social status, the playwright remarks:

I say, he goes back to his mountain. It belongs to him. He has another name and now he can say it. He can get up in the morning, who gives a shit that he is poor? Okay, a Marxist gives a shit if he is poor, a politician gives a shit if he is poor, and therefore a poet should give a shit if he is poor. I'm not talking about poverty, I'm talking about the sense of ownership that allows him to feel that when he walks on that road, it belongs to him. (CDW, 167)

Yet Walcott does give more than 'a shit' about poverty. One has only to hear the cry of 'the wretched of the earth' in the title poem of *The Fortunate Traveller*.

'A white French language in a white pith helmet' – here, personified, is the link between class, race and language. Walcott recognizes the role of language in colonialism and in the division between lower and middle classes in West Indian society, and consequently the factor of language in the sense of a divided self in the West Indian writer, when he says:

Language and the experience of illiteracy among the poor is a profound problem that divides the West Indian writer. The more sophisticated he becomes, the more alienated is his mental state. It is not his business to lower his standards to insult the poor. When one is confronted with this problem of language, two situations occur: wanting to reach one's people; and realizing the harsh realities of the society, the depression and the economic exploitation. At the same time that one's intellect becomes refined, and one learns more about the society, there is a movement away from that society. (CDW, 39–40)

A marker of this alienation is the dichotomy between Standard English and creole, which is related to the distinction that Walcott makes between the language of the 'interior life' of poetry and the more public, declamatory language of the theatre. Referring to the poor, the people of the streets, he says:

Years ago, watching them, and suffering as you watched, you proffered silently the charity of a language which they could not speak, until your suffering, like the language, felt superior, estranged. The dusk was a raucous chaos of curses, gossip and laughter; everything performed in public, but the voice of the inner language was reflective and mannered, as far above its subjects as that sun which would never set until its twilight became a metaphor for the withdrawal of Empire and the beginning of our doubt. (*WTS*, 4)

Given the view, expressed or implied in these statements, that Standard English is superior to creole or dialect, Walcott will also observe, on the other hand, 'I don't think you can say that a thought is more subtle in an imperial language than it is in a colonial dialect. I know a feeling cannot be' (*CDW*, 76). He has been fond of using the term 'dialect' as much metaphorically as literally, to indicate the native strength, the capacity for survival and community, of the people. In 'The Almond Trees,' using the trees as symbols of ancestral slave mothers, he spoke of 'their leaves' broad dialect [as] a coarse, / enduring sound / they shared together' (*C*, 37). More than twenty-five years later, in the Nobel lecture, evoking the 'self-defining dawn' (*WTS*, 79) of a West Indian culture, he celebrates 'the sounds of a fresh dialect, the native tongue', 'a fresh language and a fresh people', and declares: 'I stand here . . . in the name of the dialect they exchange like the leaves of the trees whose names are suppler, greener, more morning-stirred than English' (*WTS*, 79-80).

It sometimes matters to understand that when Walcott is addressing the question of choosing between writing in the vernacular or in English, it is French patois that is the vernacular. Besides, in such moments, the question is more clear-cut than would be the case with a West Indian writer faced with choosing between Standard English and some Anglophone creole, since the French patois, by contrast with any Anglophone Caribbean creole, is more obviously and

decidedly a different language from English. Walcott is thinking specifically of the French patois when he says, for example: 'My real language, and tonally my basic language, is patois . . . Well, I've tried to write poems in patois and feel that later, or maybe in my fifties, I will try to do something of that kind. On the other hand, it sometimes seems to me to be an academic thing' (*CDW*, 29). In general, though, we may understand 'the vernacular' – and 'dialect' is Walcott's preferred term – to include all versions available to him.

Having said that he considers patois his 'real language', Walcott then says that for him to write in patois 'sometimes seems . . . to be an academic thing'. In 1982 he says, as also already quoted, that he does not 'think that [West Indian writers] have as yet managed to express fully the subtleties that are possible in dialect' (*CDW*, 77). However, some eight years earlier he was arguing that West Indian poets who cultivate creole are really 'fiddl[ing] with the obvious limitations of dialect because of chauvinism' (*WTS*, 51).³⁰ Despite the subtleties of creole and its bonding strength, despite 'the poetry which they spoke' (*WTS*, 33), 'the people . . . awaited a language. They confronted a variety of styles and masks, but because they were casual about commitment, ashamed of their speech, they were moved only by the tragi-comic and the farcical. The tragi-comic was another form of self-contempt. They considered tragedy to be, like English, an attribute beyond them' (*WTS*, 16). On the other hand,

the West Indian poet is faced with a language which he hears but cannot write because there are no symbols for such a language and because the closer he brings hand and word to the precise inflections of the inner language and to the subtlest accuracies of his ear, the more chaotic his symbols will appear on the page, the smaller the regional dialect, the more eccentric his representation of it will become. (*WTS*, 49)

The problem may not be as intractable as Walcott seems to suggest, and he makes heavy weather of the challenge of creole orthography. No doubt it can be learned and made conventional just as the orthography of any official language is.

In 'The Muse of History' the argument about language is made to follow from the argument concerning the African slave's conversion to Christianity. For Walcott, this conversion was a positive strategy

for survival and re-creation. Indeed, far from succumbing to the colonizer's religion, the slave appropriated it. 'The slave converted himself' (*WTS*, 48). 'What was captured from the captor was his God' (*WTS*, 47). The conversion was really a subversion, and 'in fact the Hebraic-European God was changing colour' (*WTS*, 48). And so, the argument proceeds, 'as he adapted his master's religion, he also adapted his language, and it is here that what we can look at as our poetic tradition begins. Now begins the new naming of things' (*WTS*, 48). This position is either a revision of Walcott's earlier view that 'whether we wanted to or not, we have become white, in language, religion'³¹ or else between them the two positions constitute a contradiction.

Walcott's statement of his claim to English is straightforward, certain, without equivocation or apology: 'I do not consider English to be the language of my masters. I consider language to be my birthright. I happen to have been born in an English and a Creole place, and love both languages' (*CDW*, 82). Furthermore, love and mastery of English do not make him any the less a Caribbean poet:

I am primarily, absolutely a Caribbean writer. The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination . . . I have never felt inhibited in trying to write as well as the greatest English poets. Now that has led to a lot of provincial criticism . . . It's not a matter of trying to be English. I am obviously a Caribbean poet. (*CDW*, 109)

To Walcott, then, it would hardly be a stigma of Eurocentricity for him to be praised, as he was by Robert Graves, for using English more masterfully than contemporary English poets,³² or by Joseph Brodsky as 'the man by whom the English language lives'.³³ Walcott's relationship with English is not adversarial. It is a matter of revelling in the potential of English, exploiting, modifying and extending it, and that appreciably by infusing into it the tone and inflection of the vernacular.

His relationship with English is consistent with his approach to verse forms and dramatic modes. There is neither obsequious acquiescence in traditional forms and modes, nor any desire to reject them on the notion that they are the prerogative of the colonizer. When he says, speaking to and about Brodsky, 'You refreshed forms and stanzas' (*B*, 64), the observation applies equally well to himself.

In this regard it is instructive to notice, for example, Wayne Brown's exposition, in the Introduction to his edition of Walcott's *Selected Poetry* (1981), of Walcott's refreshing of iambic pentameter, or Brad Leithauser's demonstration of Walcott's monumental achievement with rhyme, metre and verse form in *Omeros*.³⁴ In some of his plays, such as *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *The Joker of Seville*, there is a significant blending of European and classical forms with African-derived West Indian vernacular performance styles and forms. In *Pantomime* and *A Branch of the Blue Nile* the question of the choice and relationship between creole and classical theatre styles becomes itself an issue humorously and thought-provokingly engaged. In the plays, the potential of verse as a dramatic medium is continuously being tested and advanced, to strikingly fresh effect in, for example, *The Odyssey: a Stage Version*. In the poetry, there has been a developing interest in the interplay of genres and modes – lyric, narrative, dramatic, together with certain qualities of prose fiction.

It remains to mention another feature of Walcott's way with language and his general approach to style in the expressive arts. He works out of a dualism and tension between a will towards plainness, sparseness, quiet and simplicity on the one hand, and an instinct for eloquence, literary allusiveness, rich texture, verbal play and resounding effects on the other.³⁵ This dualism and tension are another manifestation of his creative 'schizophrenia'. He had declared early that his aim was 'to write / Verse crisp as sand, clear as sunlight, / Cold as the curled wave, ordinary / As a tumbler of island water' (*CP*, 52). Later, when he is 'Nearing Forty,' he extols 'the style past metaphor' (*CP*, 136). However, he is a poet whose *métier*, most engrossingly, is metaphor. He seeks clarity, but it is the clarity of 'a crystal of ambiguities' (*CP*, 200). He admired Gregorias' ability to paint 'with the linear elation of an eel / one muscle in one thought' (*CP*, 201), but he himself 'lived in a different gift, / its element metaphor' (*CP*, 201). It therefore sounds almost too good to be true to hear the young Walcott, at the end of a letter to Henry Swanzy dated 6 July 1952, in a self-questioning cry, 'Why do I always write so much metaphor?'³⁶

The tension between the will to sparseness, simplicity, lucidity and directness on the one hand, and the impulse towards volubility,

complexity and obliquity on the other, have their parallel, as Walcott acknowledges, in the plays. Speaking about the kind of theatre he was trying to achieve in plays like *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Malcochon*, he says that he was trying to fuse two conflicting tendencies, one towards a theatre 'essential and spare', relying on gesture and reduced 'almost to an inarticulateness of language', and the other towards volubility and verbal richness (CDW, 48). He identifies the former with the oral, African-derived folk tradition, and the latter with the Western literary tradition. But there is also a tradition of linguistic display and volubility in West Indian folk expression. The fusion is not always fully achieved, and the literariness and verbal display may at times seem self-indulgent, as some of the speeches of *The Joker of Seville*.

With regard to the sound of verse, whether in poetry or poetic drama, there is in Walcott an interplay and tension between a plain, low-key sound, and the sonorously large verbal gesture. Again, as with semantic texture, the plain and low-key would seem to be largely a matter of will or desire, the sonorous or richly worked music more a matter of natural inclination. After all, his young mind had been 'drenched in Elizabethan literature' and nurtured on Jacobean cadences (WTS, 11). In general, if he moved away from a sound conventionally mellifluous and declamatory, he has continued to draw on mellifluousness and resonance, though of a more complex and subtle kind than in his early work.

In answering questions about the quality of sound and language in his work, and in the work of other poets, Walcott also moves between the two ends of the spectrum. He finds it to have been particularly commendable in Robert Lowell that he kept 'the banality banal' yet managed to make it 'poetic' (CDW, 118). When Edward Hirsch remarks that Walcott's poetry 'seems to have gotten increasingly plainer and more direct, less gnarled, more casual, somehow both quieter and fiercer' (CDW, 120), and cites *Midsummer* as example, Walcott happily assents and suggests that 'the most exciting thing' for the poet is 'to feel that [the poem] is becoming antimelodic' (CDW, 120). Talking to David Montenegro, also with reference to *Midsummer*, he identifies the clarity and simplicity of water as his instructive trope, and commends what he refers to, without illustration, as 'the elemental, unmeasured, unscannable'

clarity of Blake (*CDW*, 146). He warns against the threat of pomposity in theatrical speech, the danger of 'the voice getting up on a platform . . . and performing' (*CDW*, 145).

On the other hand, responding to the suggestion that sometimes his own poetic language becomes inflated, he will say, 'Even pomposity can be charming' (*CDW*, 82). Explaining his fondness for poetic eloquence, and justifying his early attraction to the 'mighty line' of Marlowe and Milton, he argues that the poet, and more so the Caribbean poet, is of necessity a performer, even to himself. Besides, 'It's better to be large and to make huge gestures than to be modest and do tiptoeing types of presentation of oneself . . . The voice does go up in a poem . . . And the greatest address is in the rhetoric' (*CDW*, 104). Interestingly enough, while rhetoric and large gestures may easily be accused of self-indulgence, when Walcott is asked about some contemporary American poetry, 'especially the narrative, flat-voiced poets', he expresses the view that they are 'egocentric', 'vain in their modesty', and ultimately 'boring' (*CDW*, 187). He pursues this line of criticism in an interview with William Baer, and says that, with some exceptions, 'No one dares to write a capital letter word like Pity, or Love . . . contemporary poetry doesn't exalt, it doesn't condemn, and it's all very muted' (*CDW*, 205). He is no doubt also speaking on behalf of his own 'daring'. He will risk the large gesture and is not afraid of the old-fashioned poetic 'O': 'O love, we die alone!' (*CP*, 56); 'O Beauty, you are the Light of the World!' (*AT*, 48).

In justifying his fondness for sonorousness and the large verbal gesture as an inevitable expression of his Caribbeanness, Walcott may to some extent be rationalizing after the fact. At the same time, such justification constitutes, in effect, the affirmation of a Caribbean aesthetic, and forms part of Walcott's consistent identification of himself as a Caribbean poet, despite the apparent dismissal of regional categorization when he speaks of 'traps [such] as "feminist" fiction and "British" fiction' (*CDW*, 178). If, one may ask, there is such a thing as a Caribbean poet, why not also such a thing as British fiction? Walcott's revelling in English 'is not a matter of trying to be English. I am obviously a Caribbean poet' (*CDW*, 109).

On occasion, some Caribbean feature which he affirms will itself, ironically, turn out by his own argument to be identifiable with some non-Caribbean feature:

And yet, behind it all [literary high-soundingness], I have a strong sense of structure, which is an English thing, because I live with a structured, formal public kind of expression in Calypso. I can't eradicate song from my own air [ear?]: I'm surrounded by it in the Caribbean. Rhyme is a natural thing to me . . . The Calypso is pentametric in composition, and rhyme is essential. While it may seem old-fashioned or archaic to an American poet, we're talking about a living, vital tradition that I come out of. (*CDW*, 62)

One may ask why 'a strong sense of structure' should not have been regarded simply as native to the calypso, without any need to identify it (however correctly) as 'an English thing'. It is also arguable whether the calypso is indeed 'pentametric in composition.' No doubt, too, American 'flat-voiced' poets might validate their characteristic tone in terms of cultural authenticity. What is certain is Walcott's impulse to find cultural correspondences between Caribbean and non-Caribbean cultural/aesthetic features, to the point where it may even seem, paradoxically, that 'Caribbean' characteristically includes 'non-Caribbean'. In any event, J. Edward Chamberlin's observation that '[t]here are many ways of being a West Indian, and many ways of being a poet'³⁷ is most useful in consideration of Walcott's poetic identity.

Walcott's insistence on his Caribbeanness is all the more noteworthy in light of the not unusual view that his art is Eurocentric. The issue is also germane to discussion about regionalism and universality in literature. When Robert Hamner asked whether there was a danger that, 'in working toward a regional kind of theatre [Walcott] might sacrifice quality to provincialism', Walcott replied, 'No, I think that in the real theatre no matter who the writer is, he is inevitably parochial and regional and very focal in particular things – whether it is Odets writing about people in Brooklyn or Pinter writing about his types. The more particular you get, the more universal you become' (*CDW*, 24).³⁸ In other words, local or regional focus and particularity are far from being at odds with universal relevance. Our common humanity expresses itself, and

should command the world's attention in proportion as it engages most truly with its circumstances of time and place.

In praising Walcott, Brodsky lamented that poets on both sides of the Atlantic have persistently sought to keep him in his place, so to speak, by labelling him 'a West Indian poet' or 'a black poet from the Caribbean'. To Brodsky, these labels 'are myopic and misleading'.³⁹ Ultimately, however, Brodsky seems to be arguing not so much against the use of the labels as against the abuse of them. Walcott has had no qualms about calling himself a Caribbean poet. It is the reader's responsibility to understand all that he comprehends by his aspiration to be 'a fulfilled West Indian artist' (*CDW*, 171). As Brodsky says, Walcott has 'immortalized' the Caribbean by giving it 'a status of lyrical reality'.⁴⁰ When the world acclaim *Omeros*, it is recognizing the Caribbean as a 'full' place in the world's imagination. For his part, Walcott, in giving *Omeros* to the world, is making an act of homage to his Caribbean, and acknowledging that his world-ensphering mind has been shaped in the Caribbean. The Nobel lecture, too, is an act of homage to the Caribbean. The reverent humility of its close is at the same time a large and authoritative claim on behalf of the Caribbean.

Connections and separations: from 25 Poems to The Gulf

Walcott assented readily when David Montenegro observed that, although there had been ‘many changes’ in his work, there had been no development as such, since ‘a maturity in the voice’ had been present even in ‘the earliest poems’ (*CDW*, 147). Walcott said that he had been struck by how, ‘tonally,’ he seemed to have been always ‘the same person talking’, the same poet that he had been at age eighteen (*CDW*, 148). Some qualification is necessary. In his earliest poems as a whole – from the three privately published books, beginning with *25 Poems*, published when he was eighteen, and up to his first commercially published collection, *In A Green Night: Poems 1948–1962* (1962) – he is still feeling for a voice, for his stylistic signature.¹

In the three earliest books, many of the poems, however accomplished, remain primarily exercises after the manner of the poets, notably the English poets of the thirties, to whom he was going to school at the time. Even in this respect, though, he was signalling crucial new directions for West Indian poetry, wrenching it out of a ‘soft’ Romantic–Victorian–Edwardian tradition and into a more intellectually demanding modernity. If there is not yet full maturity, there is compelling precociousness, both in the imitation of modern poetic styles and in the general air of world-knowingness and angst; and there are enough memorable figures and flashes of wit to go beyond mere promise.

In *25 Poems*, *Epitaph for the Young* (1949) and *Poems* (1951), thought moves for the most part in large abstractions, tending towards didactic, epigrammatic statement, and is not so much embodied in the sensuous particularity of experience and environment. Nor has the poet settled yet into that characteristic procedure

whereby the thought of a poem evolves through articulation of a web of metaphorical associations. At the same time, it is remarkable how much, how germinally the cast of Walcott's poetic thought was set from the beginning. The early work up to *In A Green Night* is seeded with themes, motifs and moments which were to be definitively cultivated later.

Epitaph for the Young illustrates well the potential reach as well as the limitations of the poet in his youth. Although this work was the second published, it spans a period that begins well before the publication of 25 *Poems*, having been started in December 1946, shortly before his seventeenth birthday, and completed in June 1949. Walcott was eventually to describe *Epitaph* as the ur-text of *Another Life* (CDW, 23). It is indeed the first version of his 'portrait of the artist as a young man', and draws explicitly on Joyce's *Portrait*. But it also displays the presence of other literary progenitors: 'Well all the influences are there: I mean they are visible, deliberately quoted influences. . . There's Joyce, and *The Waste Land*, and Pound' (CDW, 23). There are others as well, such as Whitman, and *The Odyssey*, and Dante's *Inferno*.

The ease with which one can usually hear '[o]ther men's voices,/ other men's . . . lines' (CP, 248) in Walcott has provided fertile ground for the influence-spotters for whom the identification of influences is likely to cast doubt on the originality of the poet. Robert Mazzocco spent most of his review of *Selected Poems* (1964) in compiling a catalogue of literary echoes in the poems, as if that in itself was criticism enough.² Leif Sjöberg, in a 1983 interview, asked Walcott, with reference to his drawing on other writers, especially recent or contemporary ones: 'Do you not recognize a risk that, on occasion, you go too far and imitate? That your own voice is not heard so well?' (CDW, 83).

In reply, Walcott vigorously asserted his belief in the necessity of apprenticeship, an idea he had expressed before and to which he would continue to hold: 'The whole course of imitations is simply a method of apprenticeship' (CDW, 53). It was natural, indeed a good thing, that young poets should sound like the masters; that is how they learned to release the sound of their own voices, 'to find', as he said of himself, 'a voice that was not inflected by influences' (CDW, 53). But when the question of his influences continues to preoccupy

critics, he begins to revise his idea of a distinctive voice: 'One's own voice is an anthology of all the sounds one has heard . . . Originality is the obsession of ambitious talent' (CDW, 83). He even goes so far as to suggest, 'I may not have wanted to be a poet but an anthology, which I don't mind, because I enjoy so many voices that my own is irritating' (CDW, 147). In other words, he is turning any charge of wearing influences on his sleeve into a virtue. One should hardly take him too literally in this. He is really still finding a way of defining his own voice. When Robert Brown and Cheryl Johnson told him that 'there seemed to be echoes of Eliot' (CDW, 185) in the work they had heard him read the previous night, he rejected the idea. He then explained that sometimes what might seem like imitation is only a coincidence of experience and response which will inevitably be recorded in similar ways. When Brown and Johnson went on to ask if he suffered to any degree from the 'anxiety of influence', he dismissed the phrase as meaningless.

Walcott suggests that what he regards as the obsession with originality must be seen in context, as being very much a recent fashion – 'the twentieth century . . . is obsessed with the idiosyncratic genius, the doing your own thing, having your own style' (CDW, 148). He had said earlier, 'Fear of imitation obsesses minor poets' (WTS, 62). It is not that Walcott does not seek to hear his own voice, but that he believes that that interest may be corrupted by a paranoia which manifests itself in 'frantically try[ing] to escape any accusation of sounding like anyone else' (CDW, 147). Joseph Brodsky lends support to Walcott: 'A true poet does not avoid influences or continuities but frequently nurtures them . . . Fear of influence, fear of dependence, is the fear – the affliction – of a savage, but not of culture, which is all continuity, all echo.'³

'EPITAPH FOR THE YOUNG'

Epitaph for the Young is Walcott's youthful attempt at the long narrative poem, and so declares an experimental interest that will attain mature realization in the varying modes of *Another Life*, *Omeros*, *Tiepolo's Hound* and *The Prodigal*. In twelve free-verse cantos, after a format and style that basically combine Pound and Eliot, it conveys at one and the same time a precociously valedictory

and elegiac sense of I-have-seen-it-all and a sense of the anticipatory and questing. Six of the twelve cantos end on the wandering/wondering note 'towards':

So I began to write, to take up arms,
Fitting out vaguely for a pitiless sea,
Willing to drown under impersonal stars . . .
On a strange sea . . .
towards . . . (*EY*, 12)

The allusion to Hamlet, in the integrated metaphors of 'arms' and 'sea' ('take arms against a sea of troubles') and the allusion to Auden's Icarus ('Musée des Beaux Arts') in the third line are characteristic of the young poet's rifling of the masters at this period. They are also integral to the mood, theme and self-image of the poet which the poem develops.

An informing motif is that of the father-son relationship, which embodies the themes of apprenticeship, quest and tradition – the son questing for the lost father, the son continuing or going beyond what the father had begun, the father-figure guiding the protégé through his instructive wanderings. The motif is played on in *Epitaph* through a palimpsest of allusions: Icarus and Daedalus, Joyce's Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom, Hamlet and his dead father, Telemachus and Ulysses, Dante and Virgil, Walcott and his mentor Harold Simmons, Walcott and his own father ('Alas poor Warwick', *EY*, 20), who died when the boy was not yet two years old. To this early period belongs a poem which is his first 'complete' engagement with the shade of his father, the lyric 'In My Eighteenth Year' (25 *Poems*), which will reappear in *In A Green Night* as 'Elegy'. The father-and-son topos will continue to prove a fertile field for Walcott's imagination throughout his career.

Deepening the motif of voyage and journey by allusion to Dante, Homer and Joyce, the poem inaugurates Walcott's appropriation of that motif to negotiating the Caribbean archipelago and to the idea of his own progress as an odyssey.⁴ The format comfortably allows the peripatetic I/eye to visit and revisit not only his island(s), from the doubled perspective of insider and detached observer, but also the 'island' of his younger self and his beginnings. To this

extent it prefigures somewhat Shabine's tour of society and self in 'The Schooner *Flight*'. There is the odd snatch of the kind of graphic, sensuous description of the natural environment which is to become a basic, generative feature of Walcott's poetic method:

And then the sun,
 White birds, blue wave arched with porpoise,
 To the left
 A rim of fragile islands, virginal,
 Noise of leaves in sails, purple underside of gulls,
 Fishpots and canoes . . . (EY, 4)

There is also the odd, arresting comment, more or less satirical, or melancholic-satirical, on the West Indian social scene, an incipient comedy of manners of the island bourgeoisie:

The burden of my people; first
 They would shed the racial pride and marry well,
 That the child may not be darker than the father.
 Second, they are ruled
 By an aristocracy of bank clerks.
 Are extremely productive, yet consider
 Their marriage statistics. A desperation of spinsters. (EY, 10)

'Burden' carries an appropriately ironic echo of 'the white man's burden'. A different kind of irony is generated by the equation between shedding racial pride and marrying well, an irony sharpened by the detached tone of '*the* racial pride' as against 'racial pride'. 'A desperation of spinsters' is a deft, economical gloss on 'marriage statistics', its gender bias reflecting the values of the society being depicted. There is an Eliotesque ennui in:

They shall
 Motor to Vigie on Sundays, sleep in the afternoon
 And nightly, the urge of democracy, and the urge to dress,
 The cinema on Sunday, set aside for distinction.
 In the week they shall
 Have so much to do that boredom shall busy them. (EY, 19)

In the precociously retrospective, interior voyage through and to self, the seminal theme of memory, announced in the epigraph from Baudelaire, is broached. In this interior voyage, Walcott is beginning

what he calls, again precociously, 'the exhausting exploration of the self' (*EY*, 5).

In 'Allegre' he will say that 'to find the true self is still arduous' (*GN*, 59). Already, too, the process of self-construction is working the trope of considering oneself in the mirror: 'In the mirror the 'me' staring, image of my conceit, / Sunken eyes, weak mouth, the ragged hair, / Betrayed in photographs' (*EY*, 2).

The self-deflating, humorous potential of this self-portrait is nicely integrated with social satire in an Eliotesque passage which prefigures the episode of 'tea with the British Council representative' in *Another Life* (*CP*, 248). The nineteen-year-old poet looks back at his first and only collection so far, as from an Olympian distance, thereby beginning the practice of 'summarizing' his life (see *M*, 40) retrospectively as it proceeds:

Suffering is applauded, encouraged, and dissolves
In a kind Englishwoman's smile among the olives,
My soul, neatly transfixed in toothpick proportions
Is spread among the lenient, lovely patrons.
By 25 gestures of a lame mind,
The privately prejudiced pretended to be tamed. (*EY*, 30)

'Privately prejudiced' is ironically nuanced by the implied 'privately published' (in relation to 25 *Poems*); but the fittingly clipped quality brought to the phrase by the alliterative 'p' is diffused by the alliteration's being overdone with 'pretended'. 'Lovely,' also, is an epithet which the later Walcott might have excised or replaced, as not doing enough work.

In passages like this, Walcott shows that even in his early work he is both reflecting and engaging the colonial, or what came to be called the postcolonial condition, interrogating ideas of marginality, cultural identity, place and displacement. The lines 'Remembering / My youth, in the crater of the year. / Here I was born' (*EY*, 1) are themselves the ur-text of the definitive, linguistically and historically resonant concluding line of section II of 'Sainte Lucie', 'is there that I born' (*CP*, 314). In this kind of engagement, he begins to foreground such concerns as the idea of history and its problematic challenge for the West Indian imagination, the ideas of creolization and hybridity, 'island' as idea and as trope, and the making of a

West Indian literary tradition. His epigraph to Canto iv – ‘There is not a West Indian Literature’ (EY, 9) – is itself a landmark statement in the history of West Indian literature. In the very fact and moment of its utterance, he is heralding and participating in the decisive stage of the emergence of that literature. In the process, he produces an aphorism that encapsulates crucial, yet-to-be-developed aspects of his thought on these matters: ‘A tradition is not made, it evolves / Through those who are not concerned with history’ (EY, 9).

‘25 POEMS’ AND ‘POEMS’

The sense of the dawning of a new day in West Indian literature and the focussing of the postcolonial challenge for the new generation are strong in a poem like ‘Call for Breakers and Builders’: ‘Whether you are brown, lonely, golden or black, young / Man, construct the day of companions’.⁵ This poem may well have been inspired to some degree by Stephen Spender as well as the Jamaican poet George Campbell, to whose *First Poems* (1945) Walcott had been introduced by Harold Simmons, as he acknowledges in the first chapter of *Another Life*. ‘Call for Breakers and Builders’ speaks with a straightforwardness about its topic, a drawing of clear lines between socio-cultural alternatives, which will generally disappear in the relative complexity with which Walcott will subsequently treat such matters: ‘Almost impossible and absurd the distant love for / England. Love is here, and luck under your / Feet.’⁶

Along with this comparatively public, exhortatory note, there will also largely fade out of Walcott’s poetry, after the three early collections, that direct, impersonal social criticism, often of a satirical cast, that we have already noticed. In the poetry in this mode, colour and race are highlighted as a West Indian social problem. There is also a focus on middle-class pretension, social-climbing and vacuity. This social portraiture, evident in *25 Poems* in pieces such as ‘A Letter to a Sailor’ and ‘Travelogue’, and, as we have seen, in certain passages of *Epitaph for the Young*, is particularly noticeable in *Poems*, and more particularly in the poems about Jamaica. For example, ‘Montego Bay – Travelogue II’ depicts some problematic aspects of a poor,

predominantly black island society that depends on a tourist trade oriented towards affluent, metropolitan whites: "Teach all the girls to perform a white ballet, / To grin at cricketers on equality's field day, / Excite them with scarves, make the prize hen lay eggs, / Make a ballet negres."⁷

Such pictures express Walcott's reaction to the relatively stark and startling contrasts and realities of Jamaican society, which he was then newly experiencing, having arrived in Jamaica in October 1950 to enrol as an undergraduate in the University College of the West Indies. Of these early poems which depict the West Indian social scene, the only one which found its way into *In A Green Night* – no doubt because of its distinctively polished, outwardly whimsical, ironic wit – is 'A Country Club Romance', entitled 'Margaret Verlieu Dies' in *Poems*. The later title is truer to the tone of the piece.

That Walcott was largely to abandon the vein of satirical description of middle-class island society, and of more or less directly focussed comment on issues of class and colour in that society, may have been a result of critical reception of his early work. If so, that situation would in itself illustrate one kind of problem facing the writer in an emergent literature. The exuberant local reaction to Walcott's locally published collections showed, at the same time, how far ahead of his reviewers he was, and how little he had to learn from them. They did not provide sufficiently informed, expert critical analysis. That was to come from the two reviews which the English poet Roy Fuller did for the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme. These may have helped determine Walcott's subsequent direction. For instance, in his review of *25 Poems*, broadcast on 22 May 1949, Fuller was as enthusiastic as any West Indian about the new 'find', but he was critically and analytically so. What is more, he assessed Walcott on equal terms, so to speak, without any condescension or any special consideration for his being from the outposts of empire.

Fuller commends Walcott for taking as his main models the poets of the thirties, especially Auden. He sees them as the desirable contemporary pathfinders for an appropriately modern poetry. He makes a point of appreciating 'the frank way in which [Walcott] has

imitated those poets who have influenced him'.⁸ This observation must have strengthened Walcott in his own attitude toward the question of influences, and in his idea of the necessity of deliberate apprenticeship. But while commending Walcott for learning from Auden, Spender and Louis MacNeice and, behind them, Eliot, he laments in Walcott the influence of Dylan Thomas. Walcott apparently took Fuller's advice seriously, because Fuller, in his review of *Poems*, broadcast on 23 March 1952, was able to say that Walcott's 'new poems are written almost entirely'⁹ under Auden's influence. No mention of Thomas now. It is therefore, perhaps, not mere coincidence that Walcott, speaking to Edward Hirsch twenty-five years later about the question of influences and originality, should say: '[W]hen I was criticized for writing like Dylan Thomas, it didn't bother me at all because I knew what I was doing' (CDW, 53). The Thomas voice was indeed virtually unheard in *Poems*. Still, the side of Walcott's imagination that responded to Thomas, the instinct for sonority and the richly sensuous metaphor, is no less real than the side that responded to Auden. The Walcott voice is the mediation and interplay between those two sides.

While noting, with apparent approval, the more completely Audenesque quality of *Poems*, Fuller found that the collection was weakened by Walcott's trying to stretch inappropriate material to fit the higher reaches of the Audenesque,

trying to make tremendous, generalized, Audenesque statements about things that are too personal or too provincial to bear them. Of course, what Walcott is satirizing, being indignant about, in some of these poems is important, but to the remote, impartial reader questions of class or colour in the West Indies simply will not stand in place of or as symbols for the questions of a larger world.¹⁰

Here is an instance of the power of received constructs of centre and margin; of how notions of a privileged universalism, deriving from a presumed centre, impose themselves on the writer at the supposed margin. The 'larger world' is an exclusionary category. The West Indies are outside of it, and West Indian questions of race and colour are inappropriate subjects to detain the 'larger world'. In any event, Walcott for all practical purposes gave up the kind of direct, satirical social-commentary mode. It would reassert itself

much later in, say, the angry passages of *Another Life*, and in pieces like 'The Schooner *Flight*' and 'The Spoiler's Return', where it achieves an enhanced vibrancy through the techniques of the mask and dramatic monologue.

'IN A GREEN NIGHT'

One must make special mention, though, of Walcott's sophisticated early venture into the mode of satirical and ironic social commentary and portraiture, namely the sonnet sequence 'Tales of the Islands' in *In A Green Night*. It marks the beginning of what was to resurface much later as a deep interest in the blending of genres and modes. The sequence is remarkable for the way in which it blends lyric and narrative modes (each poem being like a short story in cameo) and achieves some of the qualities of prose fiction in a wry, ironic speaking voice which, in one or two ground-breaking instances, moves easily between creole vernacular and Standard English.

'Tales' first appeared in *Bim* in 1958. In their prefatory 'Notebook' to that issue of the magazine, the editors quoted from an otherwise unpublished statement by Walcott¹¹ explaining the experiment which the sequence represents:

What I have been trying to do with them [the sonnets] over the last five years is to get a certain factual, biographical plainness about them. I suppose the idea is to do away with the prerogative of modern prose in narration. Also to dislocate the traditional idea of the sonnet as a fourteen-line piece of music. The idea is the same as in prose: dispassionate observation. Say nothing but cut the bronze medallion and present it to the normal poetry reader saying, Here you are, verse was here first, and it's time we got back what they took from it. As a result the pieces may read flat. But as much selection goes into making them work as into the traditional lyric . . .¹²

That statement focusses the creative tension in Walcott between the will towards plainness and even 'flatness', and the instinct for melodiousness, resonant musicality and metaphorical play of nuances. The tension is implicit even in the image of the bronze medallion. While being used to represent the plain, objective, factual statement, it simultaneously introduces the vibrations of

metaphor. This latter suggestion is all the more available if the image is, as it may well be, an allusion to a line in Archibald MacLeish's 'Ars Poetica', where poetry is figured as being ideally '[d]umb / as old medallions to the thumb'.¹³

'Tales' does achieve 'a certain factual, biographical plainness' that has qualities of prose fiction, whether in description of scene and event, or in thumbnail portraits of island 'characters'. The ambience of prose fiction is also suggested in the fact that the sonnets are identified as 'chapters'. In the portraits of Cosimo de Chretien (*CP*, 22–3), Miss Rossignol (*CP*, 23) and the 'exile, with the wry face of a Jew' (*CP*, 26), Walcott probes the derelict-genteel corners of island society. His sharp, cold eye for irony is moistened by a hint of poignancy, a feeling for the outcast and the exile, especially evident in the portrait of Franklin, the Conradian sea-captain¹⁴ (chapter VII), adrift and falling apart in the malarial shallows of his tropical lotus-island. This sonnet was to be the seed that grew into the still unpublished play *Franklin*.

A contrasting type satirized in 'Tales' is the '[b]lack writer chap, one of them Oxbridge guys' (*CP*, 25). Then there are the more seemingly personal, autobiographical chapters, which centre on the feelings and crises of the narrator-protagonist. Through all of these portraits and scenes, Walcott draws some of the 'sociological contours' (*CP*, 148) of the island, sharpening them with the irony in various types of contrast: between appearance and reality, inherited social status and actual degeneration, intellectual enlightenment and 'backward' practices, spirituality and sexual promiscuity, official religion and 'primitive' superstition. These ironies, and the contrasts and nuances of the social scene are also conveyed through the interplay of different linguistic registers: Standard English, broken English, West Indian creole, varieties of formal/scrabal and varieties of vernacular/oral, as in chapter IV ('Outside I said, "He's a damned epileptic / Your boy, El Greco!"' (*CP*, 23)) and chapter VI ('Poopa, da' was a fete! I mean it had / Free rum, free whisky' (*CP*, 24)).¹⁵

The sequence as a whole delineates a fiction of a world in which the narrator locates himself. The effect is to suggest the complexity of such acts of self-location, the tension between attachment and a virtually inevitable sense of alienation. This theme and action are underlined by the fact that two of the more personal and lyrical

sonnets open and close the sequence. The latter has none of the ironic distancing of the rest, and is a poignant recall of Walcott's sadness at leaving the island. This is the moment which marked the end of that early, formative life that is recounted in the first three books of *Another Life*. What is more, the earlier version of 'Tales' had eleven sonnets. The penultimate one (the original chapter x) is another poignant lyric, with the epigraph 'you can't go home again', and tells of a return visit to the island after the departure described in the final sonnet. Significantly, both were subsequently spliced into Book Three of *Another Life* with nicely managed segues. This fact supports a reading of 'Tales' as being itself an ur-text of *Another Life*.

The theme and action of the poet locating himself, in his landscape and in his socio-cultural milieu, is the armature of *In A Green Night*. This armature supports poems about undertaking the vocation of poetry, poems about identification with the landscape and the people, about the 'place' and mystique of islands and island people, poems about the history of the place and the poet's attitude towards that history. 'Prelude', 'The Harbour', 'To A Painter in England', 'Elegy' and 'A Letter from Brooklyn', all deal centrally and variously with the commitment to the poetic vocation, the anticipation and challenge of embarking on the voyage of that vocation. 'To A Painter in England', addressed to his mentor and painting master Harold Simmons, 'Elegy' and 'A Letter from Brooklyn' (these two about the artist-father whom the poet never knew) express the idea of continuing the artistic traditions of the elders.

In 'A Letter from Brooklyn' we hear Walcott mastering a voice which, while breaking up the strongly stressed iambic beat, nevertheless attains a quiet, reverential dignity. Here, too, we can see the poetry entering upon what is to be perhaps its most characteristic modus operandi, one in which images natural to the occasion that produces the poem suggest metaphorical possibilities, which are then exploited to carry the force and meaning of the poem. The frail, spidery handwriting of the old woman who writes to the young poet, recalling his father with affection and respect, signifies at one and the same time humankind's fragility and mortality and the radiant resilience of the human spirit. Her tenuous, teetering lines metamorphose into the shining steel of her simple Christian faith

and the endurance of art. The spider's web, which is the letter the old woman weaves, becomes a metaphor for the poem, for poetry: 'As touch a line and the whole web will feel' (*CP*, 41).

The old woman's writing 'restores' the young poet's 'sacred duty to the Word' (*CP*, 42). In this idea is the enduring chain of poetry, of writing – his father, the old woman writing to him about his father, he himself writing about all this. This idea is to be developed in 'Forest of Europe' (*CP*, 375–8). Here too is, as it were, the opening scene of a drama which will persist through Walcott's poetry, between the word of poetry and the Word of God. For instance, there is the idea that poetry or art replaces institutionalized religion, being charged with the same, essentially religious instinct. However, there also recurs an obsessive feeling of guilt, betrayal and regret at having lost the simple faith of childhood: 'Rooted in childhood, faith cracks a hundred ways' ('The Cracked Playground', *Poems*, 19). Other early poems – 'Choc Bay', 'Steersman, My Brother' (*GN*) – agonize rather volubly and histrionically about losing the inherited doctrinal faith – 'Faith. A worn carpet under an old nun's feet' ('The Sisters of Saint Joseph', *Poems*, 45).

We may pursue the drama of the two 'words' through, for example, 'Crusoe's Island' and 'The Wedding of An Actress' (*C*), Book One of *Another Life*, 'Forest of Europe' (*SAK*) and 'Eulogy to W. H. Auden' (*AT*) and the title sequence of *The Bounty* (1997). In 'The Bounty' Walcott returns to his Methodist, churchgoing childhood, when he 'believed in His Word, / . . . in whose rustling hymnals [he also] heard / the fresh Jacobean springs' (*B*, 8) of English. His own language, his poetry, would come both to replace, as it were, and to continue the language of hymn and psalm. At the same time, he would draw easily and persistently on Christian imagery and ritual to hallow his identification with his landscape, his love of the islands. At first his procedure may be largely 'colouring', but it would deepen over the years into an elemental conviction of the numinous in nature and the miraculous in the ordinary.

The poem in *In A Green Night* which best evokes the sense of the sacred in the beauty of the islands is 'A Sea-Chantey'. By using the 'ch' spelling (instead of 'shanty'), Walcott suggests the fusion of the secular folk art of the shanty and the religious faith of the

folk. The poem is a chant or litany, appropriate to the poet's sense of the sacred in the place and the people, the 'litany of islands' (*CP*, 46). This lyrical expression of feeling for the islands is heightened by being identified with the attractiveness of island women. The poem begins by interweaving the names of islands and island places with the names of girls: 'Anguilla, Adina, / Antigua, Cannelles, / Andreuille, all the l's, / Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles' (*CP*, 44). The l's are also *elles*. This construction of love of the islands in terms of the love of women is a feature of other poems in the book, such as 'Pays Natal', 'En Mi-Carême', 'Islands' and 'A Map of the Antilles'.

But the generally simple, romantic celebration of these loves is darkened and complicated in pieces like 'A Careful Passion' and 'Return to D'Ennery; Rain'. In both, disturbing metaphors drawn from sharply observed details of the specific environment convey the experience of the death of love or of the challenges to sustaining a pure, unqualified love. 'A Careful Passion' enacts the ironic drama, signalled in its very title, of the ending of an illicit love affair and the persona's growing into awareness of the errors and disenchantment that beset matters of the heart. In 'Return to D'Ennery; Rain' the poet learns that 'the heart / is circled by sorrows' and by its 'bitter devotion to home' (*CP*, 29). The idea of the heart circled by sorrows is drawn from the image of the 'herons stoned by the rain' (*CP*, 29). Their cries as they circle the seashore at D'Ennery, a picturesque but dilapidated St Lucian fishing village, are a variation on 'the rusty cries / Of gulls revolving in the wind' (*GN*, 43) over the two lovers bringing their affair to an awkward, unlovely end at the restaurant table by the sea in 'A Careful Passion'. The herons crying in the rain at D'Ennery are one with the 'white herons of yachts / . . . at sabbath communion' (*CP*, 45) in 'A Sea-Chantey'. 'Return to D'Ennery' realizes more strenuously than chapter x of the first version of 'Tales of the Islands' that 'you can't go home again', that growing up is always a loss of innocence and the idea of home is always problematic.

To feel at home is to be at ease with history; but history is also problematic for Walcott. The wound of history is salted by factors of race, culture and tradition. Considering the beautiful seascape of 'Choc Bay', the poet reflects:

And I, with my black
 Heart, and my back
 Healing from history . . .
 Have heard the story
 Of each white goddess whom the waves
 Bearing time's bitter legends gave
 To those whose lives are circled by the sea. (*GN*, 24)

The backs of 'the black, the despairing, the poor' (*CP*, 29) are taking a long time to heal from the lash of history, the history with which 'Ruins of a Great House' nevertheless enacts a rapprochement. The 'great house' or 'big house', residence of the slave master, which had dominated plantation landscape and society, is an emotionally charged image in the West Indian imagination. In the poem, the persona's walk round the ruins of a great house is the occasion for a probing into the midden of history, an action which rekindles a flame of rage at the history of slavery and 'the leprosy of Empire' (*CP*, 19). As persona and poem proceed, the flame rises, but even from the outset the 'coal of . . . compassion' (*CP*, 20), which will eventually neutralize the rage, is flickering. To a certain extent, the resolution of the crisis is predetermined.

One ground of resolution is signalled in the epigraph, from Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*, to the effect that, no matter what the disparities of circumstance, all men are ultimately equal in their mortality. Besides, Time's river 'flows [unceasingly], obliterating hurt' (*CP*, 20). The persona also finds cause for compassion in the fact that England had itself experienced colonization and civil strife. The analogy is not perfect, and these grounds for the poem's resolution are attempts to rationalize what may be beyond pure reason: the wonder of compassion, the strange ways of the heart. Another factor which motivates the resolution is the effect of the English poetic tradition, on which Walcott draws, in an Eliot-like weave of quotations and allusions – Browne, Donne, Milton, Blake, Shakespeare. The poem is at once an appropriation and celebration of that tradition. The history that gave Walcott that inheritance was never likely to attract his unqualified rage. So, the England that practised 'the abuse / Of ignorance by Bible and by sword' (*CP*, 20), becomes the romantically Shakespearean 'Albion . . . / Nook-shotten, rook o'erblown' (*CP*, 20). And the poem ends in the widening,

humanity-embracing vibrations of the famous 'no man is an island' passage from Donne's *Devotions*.

The nexus of the humanizing power of poetry and the eloquence and subtlety of English also constitutes a major factor in the reconciling of opposites that is attempted in 'A Far Cry from Africa'. Even more so than with 'Ruins', 'A Far Cry' posits a well-nigh geometric balance of opposites, which proves deceptive on close examination. The poem's wide appeal to commentators on Walcott's work results no doubt from its neatly graphic paradigm of polarities, and its sanction in effect of the easy typecasting of Walcott as 'divided to the vein' (*CP*, 18). Provoked by Western wire-service reports of Mau Mau atrocities in the Kenyan liberation struggle of the 1950s, the poem describes an agony of choice for the West Indian, or at least for Walcott, between Africa and Europe. His conviction of the equalizing '[h]eredity of cruelty everywhere' ('A Lesson for This Sunday,' (*CP*, 38–39)) seems to be enough to equate the causes of both sides in the conflict. True, there is sarcasm in the representation of the struggle between 'the gorilla' (the African) and the 'superman' (the European), because those are the terms in which the 'superman' sees the struggle. There is cynical recognition of the fact that 'statistics seize and scholars justify the salients of colonial policy' (*CP*, 17). But the poem keeps itself from acknowledging that, although all cruelty and violence are in a sense one and the same, this does not negate the imbalance of power and the injustice of colonial oppression and exploitation that justified the cause of the Kenyan freedom fighters.¹⁶ Besides, the purportedly even balance and conflict of choice '[b]etween this Africa and the English tongue I love' (*CP*, 18) remains somewhat uneasy and factitious. Beyond the beauty of landscape, '[t]his Africa' is not realized in any way that establishes a vital blood-line between it and the poet. By contrast, the hold of English is real, enacted in the flourish of the series of iambic pentameter rhetorical questions with which the poem ends.

That rhetorical close is of a piece with the overall tone of *In A Green Night*, which is not so much of the 'crisp,' 'clear,' 'cold' verse, 'ordinary / As a tumbler of island water' (*CP*, 52) that 'Islands' had declared as his ambition, as of an exuberance of language, a delight in the rich music of words, in the grand and sonorous verbal gesture. In

'Roots' he invokes for the West Indies a poetry which, in its precise recreation of the environment, will be '[s]tripped of all memory of rhetoric, / As the peeled bark shows white' (*GN*, 60), but in the same poem he soon breaks into a verse that is redolent of the memory of all rhetoric.

'THE CASTAWAY'

Walcott never abandoned the ringing line, but in moving from *In A Green Night* to *The Castaway* and *The Gulf* he came to use it with less prodigality and with greater functional discretion. He moved towards sparer, yet, in a way, subtler rhythms, more angular perhaps, nearer to everyday speech and prose rhythms. Take the feel of this, for example:

Through the wide, grey loft window,
I watched that winter morning, my first snow
crusting the sill, puzzle the black,
nuzzling tom. Behind my back
a rime of crud glazed my cracked coffee-cup,
a snowfall of torn poems piling up,
heaped by a rhyming spade. (*CP*, 79)

The straightforward syntactical extension of the sentences flattens the visually apparent effect of clipped couplet-rhymes. However, over against the plainness and relatively unstudied ease of the general sound is a metaphorical richness. We might most appreciate the sparer, flatter sound at moments which would earlier have occasioned grand effects, e.g. the epiphanic moment of 'The Glory Trumpeter':

Now, as the eyes sealed in the ashen flesh,
And Eddie, like a deacon at his prayer,
Rose, tilting the bright horn, I saw a flash
Of gulls and pigeons from the dunes of coal
Near my grandmother's barracks on the wharves. (*CP*, 64)

Walcott could quite easily have written a last line which would have carried further the build-up of a climactic flourish that was being developed in the preceding lines. However, precisely at the 'point of no return', he tones down the whole by means of slight modulations.

The title poem of *The Gulf* is a controlled blend of eloquence and rhythmic emphasis on the one hand, and the plain-sounding and low-key on the other. The three-line stanza pattern is based on terza rima, but there is no attempt at a regular rhyme-scheme, and there is great freedom of movement within the three-line structure. It is not surprising then, that we find Walcott at this time writing 'Homage to Edward Thomas', in which he praises 'the formal and informal prose / of Edward Thomas's poems', and sets this appreciation over against his earlier (and never to be quite abandoned) predilection for lines that 'howl or overwhelm'. Thomas' lines, to Walcott's admiration, 'harden in their indifference' (*CP*, 103). The indifference which 'is a different rage' (*CP*, 98) now becomes an explicit poetic ideal for Walcott. Twenty-one years after *The Gulf*, when J. P. White asks him if he has one particular 'poet mentor or a group of poets whose work continues to be instructive', Walcott says: 'The poet I cherish to the point where if anybody says a single shadow of a word against him I will leave the vicinity is Edward Thomas. He's absolutely clear water' (*CDW*, 172). Although Walcott's poetry might not generally be called 'clear water', the Thomas quality remains an active ideal, and a balance to luxuriance.

The tension of styles is a function of Walcott's pursuit of the elusive and perhaps purely imaginary animal we call 'the simple truth'. 'All styles,' he writes in 'The Gulf', 'yearn to be plain / as life' (*CP*, 106). When asked by Dennis Scott, in a 1968 interview, if he was aware of any particular direction in which his poetry was moving, Walcott replied:

Well, I think – this is not being glib or fancy – my poetry is getting worse in the sense that it is becoming terrifyingly plain to me, and I am afraid that I am writing – well you know that I have a nostalgia for obscurity . . . I find that my stuff is getting so plain that I am scared. You know, it simply becomes like a vase or a glass of water . . . (*CDW*, 11–12).

In 'A Map of Europe', contemplating everyday domestic objects, he says:

The light creates its stillness. In its ring
Everything is. A cracked coffee cup,
A broken loaf, a dented urn become
Themselves . . .

No art. Only the gift

To see things as they are. . . (CP, 66).

'No art. Only the gift to see things as they are.' The poet who recognizes a 'sacred duty to the Word' (CP, 42) of poetry, can also be stricken by a nagging mistrust of the art of words. The following lines from 'Crusoe's Island' relate specifically to his professed loss of Christian faith, but they retain some validity as a general statement on the limitations of words and poetry: 'I have lost sight of hell, / Of heaven, of human will, / My skill / Is not enough' (CP, 71). This mistrust of the art of words expresses itself partly in a desire to get beyond metaphor. Walcott speaks through his Crusoe mask, about

hewing a prose
as odorous as raw wood to the adze;
out of such timbers
came our first book, our profane Genesis
whose Adam speaks that prose
which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
with poetry's surprise,
in a green world, one without metaphors . . . (CP, 92-3)

And in 'Nearing Forty' he speaks of someone whose 'life bled for the household truth, the style past metaphor' (CP, 136). But Walcott could never abandon metaphor.

In the period of *The Castaway* and *The Gulf*, Walcott's concern with getting at the unvarnished truth of things, of 'withering into truth', to borrow the title of Gordon Rohlehr's review of *The Gulf*,¹⁷ involves the exploration of imagined states of isolation and extremity, the burning away of the dross of illusion and romance. It is both a deepening of the 'arduous' effort 'to find the true self' (GN, 59) and an unblinking look into the harsh glare of West Indian experience. The poet now turns a harsher, more critical gaze on life, on his socio-historical environment and on himself. In *The Castaway* the tropical sun becomes a searing fire that burns away prettiness and smugness. It heats 'the fierce acetylene air' (C, 37) which sings the almond trees.

The increased inwardness turns a searchlight on existential anxieties and compulsions. 'The Swamp' represents, among other things, the fearful fascination of the dark places of the psyche.

Themes of isolation, alienation and loss manifest themselves at both private and public levels. For example, 'Missing the Sea' deals with the absence or loss of a beloved, 'Laventille' with communal and cultural loss ('customs and gods that are not born again' (*CP*, 88)), and 'The Whale, His Bulwark' with the world's loss of the mythical, the sense of wonder, imagination and faith. The themes of separation, shipwreck and loss are embodied in Robinson Crusoe, who is named in two of the poems – 'Crusoe's Island' and 'Crusoe's Journal' – but whose presence is a dynamic of the collection as a whole.

Walcott's Crusoe, much noticed by critics, is a polyvalent symbol which was also fortuitously appropriate in that, according to legend, the island on which 'Crusoe' was shipwrecked was Tobago, the sister island of Trinidad. Besides, the image of Crusoe had impressed itself from his childhood on Walcott's mind in the course of his 'sound colonial education' (*CP*, 346), from an illustration of Crusoe in his primary school reader.¹⁸ Crusoe represents variously isolation, disconnection, loss and, at the same time, the clarity of vision allowed by distance, as well as resourcefulness, creativity and the capacity to endure. He is the white colonizer, bringing 'the Word [of Christianity and of literature] to savages' (*CP*, 93); at the same time he is Friday appropriating Crusoe, the West Indian writer privileged to name his new world. In his paper on 'The Figure of Crusoe', Walcott gives a succinctly illuminating explanation of the multi-faceted signification of the figure in 'Crusoe's Journal'. To his list of Crusoe's variant mythic identities – Proteus, Adam, Christopher Columbus¹⁹ – one may add, as critics have usually noted, Odysseus/Ulysses.

The idea of shipwreck and the extreme of separation from an original, succouring cultural context shadows the searing engagements with West Indian history that Walcott undertakes in *The Castaway*. 'Laventille' is about the bleakest, most disconsolate picture of the West Indian condition that Walcott has ever painted. It is a condition of shipwreck from which nothing worthwhile seems salvageable. The picture is drawn by an angry compassion. From the ironic 'height of poverty' (*CP*, 86), Laventille, the underprivileged area overlooking Port of Spain, the poet looks down on 'the flat, coloured city, [where] class / escalated into structures' (*CP*, 86), and

out across the sea which recalls the horror of that 'middle passage [which] never knew its end' (*CP*, 86), an end imaged in Laventille. The fact that the occasion of the poem was a christening is put to apposite metaphoric use, not only in the idea that the future of the baby being christened is necessarily bleak, but also in the idea that the West Indian people and culture are stillborn. The extreme view that no nurturing 'customs or gods' (*CP*, 88) survived the Middle Passage is also, however, preparation for Walcott's idea of the virtue of that amnesia, that wiping of the slate clean, which will be the ground of a truly new beginning and creativity.

Another poem that seems, initially at least, to take an equally comprehensive view of the Caribbean as an absence, in this case an aboriginal absence, of human possibility, is intriguingly titled 'Air'. Using Froude's notorious statement as epigraph, the poem suggests the overwhelming, indifferent, 'un-discriminating' (*CP*, 113) presence of Nature, ruthlessly devouring all human effort and assertion, even the cruelty that was the genocide of 'two minor yellow races [the aboriginal Indians], and / half of a black' (*CP*, 113). This Nature erases and transcends history, and, by implication, human preoccupation with recrimination and penance for the abuses of history. The churning rain forest is a variant of the sea which bears no trace of any of the voyages of man. When the poem concludes that 'there is too much nothing here [in the Caribbean]' (*CP*, 114), we may read that either as a statement of absolute nihilism, or as a statement which cynically negates and overrides the Froude-Naipaul 'nothing' and Caribbean anxiety over it.

A poem in which this 'nothing' is transformed into the ground of possibility is 'The Almond Trees', in which the Crusoe idea also resonates. In 'The Figure of Crusoe' Walcott segues to this poem from his comment on 'Crusoe's Journal': 'In another one of my poems, 'The Almond Trees' . . . trying to describe the absence of history, tradition, ruins, I saw figures of ancient almond trees in a grove past Rampanalgas on the north coast [of Trinidad], as a grove of dead, transplanted, uprooted ancestors.' The next sentence of the paper is a gloss on the poem: 'We must not commit that heresy of thinking that because we "have no past", we have no future.'²⁰ This message is enacted in the poem's rigorously crafted logic of metaphor.

The poem opens at 'fore-day-morning' on any Atlantic-facing Caribbean beach: 'There's nothing here / this early; / cold sand / cold churning ocean, the Atlantic, / no visible history' (C, 36). The beach is devoid of any sign of human achievement, any monument. 'Early' refers not only to the literal time of day in the real-life action, but also, more importantly, to historical time (early in West Indian history) as well as the poem's time (early in the poem), and 'nothing' resonates with the echo of the Froude–Naipaul dismissal of the West Indies. The only human presence in the landscape is a fisherman, throwing a stick for his mongrel to retrieve. The fisherman, 'foam-haired, salt-grizzled' (C, 36), is himself a Crusoe figure, reminiscent of 'that sun-cracked, bearded face' which 'squint[s] through the sea-haze' (CP, 94) in 'Crusoe's Journal'. And the mongrel suggests the mongrel status attributed to the West Indian people.

However, history *is* visible on the beach, if one knows how to read the landscape. It is there in the 'stand / of twisted, coppery, sea-almond trees' (C, 36) – but not history as monuments, or great battles, or conquest or imperial might. Rather, history as survival and endurance and the forging of community, of a people, through and despite a traumatic rite of passage. 'Stand' also connotes standing firm, resistance. The trees symbolize the African ancestors, and more particularly the maternal ancestors of Caribbean people, as the poem takes us metaphorically through the process of their forcible uprooting and transportation across the Middle Passage, a process by which they were seasoned.

History will be even more visible on the beach when the sun comes up and 'their lengthened shapes amaze the sun' (C, 36). We may take the antecedent of 'their' to be not only, strictly speaking, the fisherman and his dog, but also, more importantly, the trees, whose long shadows will be cast by the rising sun on the blank page of the beach. The allusion here goes back, through T. S. Eliot ('The lengthened shadow of a man / Is history, said Emerson')²¹ to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, in his essay on 'Self-Reliance' had said that 'an institution is the lengthened shadow of a man', and 'all history resolves itself very early into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons'.²² The poem counters the idea of history as the achievements of great men with the idea of history as being (also) the

painful, slow effort of the nameless and the unsung. The relatively insignificant almond trees also cast a long shadow.

As the mother-symbol of the poem, the almond tree, or, as Walcott calls it, the 'sea-almond', encapsulates, variously, the ideas of uprooting and sea-crossing, taking root in the New World, cultural inferiority and mimicry. Growing uncultivated throughout the Caribbean, it may well be regarded as native to the region. However, it originated in Malaya. Its aboriginal name, whatever that was, was replaced by the Graeco-Latin name (*Terminalia catappa* [*Combretaceae*])²³ given it by European botanists. It was then named afresh and popularly in the Caribbean. But the Caribbean names – almond, Barbados-almond, Demerara-almond, Indian almond, West Indian almond and, in St Lucia and Dominica zaman (from French *des amandes*)²⁴ – designate it an imitator, mimicking the 'real', prized, commercially grown almond of the temperate North. That it is commonly found by the coast, growing presumably from seeds washed up by the sea, makes it, too, a symbol not only of shipwreck, but also of liminality.

The transformative virtue of the symbol is dramatized by the introduction into the poem of a group of young women who come down to the beach, when the sun is at its height, to swim and get a suntan. Farthest from their minds is any thought of the deep matters broached by the poem. However, the epiphanic irony is that 'Aged trees and oiled limbs share a common colour!' (C, 37). Even without knowing it, the young women are inheriting the potential of their maternal forebears and doing homage to them. The poem draws all its movements together in a solemn, ritual joy when, in its last stanza, one of the sunbathing girls, moving out of the sun, kneels to spread her beach towel in the shade and protection of the trees, the ancestors. The stand of trees becomes a sacred grove akin to the sacred groves of classical mythology. The moment is liminal.

A companion-piece to 'The Almond Trees', in its encounter with Caribbean history, is 'Verandah', which engages with the white grandfathers, whereas 'The Almond Trees' engages with the black grandmothers. Walcott was to write, in 'The Muse of History', 'that maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor' (WTS, 37). In 'Verandah', reflecting on the passing of that empire of which

the West Indies was an exploited outpost, he raises the shade of his paternal English grandfather as representative of his kind, the agents and middlemen who, to reverse an accounting idiom, 'kept [the] empire in the red' (*CP*, 89). In colour-coded maps of the world, in imperial times, the countries which made up the far-flung British Empire were coloured red.

The poet then recalls that his grandfather, a planter, was said to have set fire to his estate house at Choiseul and burned himself to death in it. This event, to which Walcott would return in poems such as 'The Train' (*G*, 24) and *Another Life* (*CP*, 181), suggests that the grandfather too, despite his colonial privilege, was a victim of the 'madness' of empire. Nevertheless, although he sought as it were to erase his name, his 'genealogical roof tree . . . survives / like seasoned timber' (*CP*, 90), in the lives and 'voices' of his generations of descendants, the promise of the children's 'green, little lives' (*CP*, 90). The poet acknowledges his identification with his father and his grandfather: 'I am the man my father loved and was' (*CP*, 90). He ends the poem with a gesture of continuity and promise, an act of filial recognition and respect not dissimilar to that with which 'The Almond Trees' ends. He climbs the stairs to the verandah on which the ghost of his grandfather sits with his ghost friends, and he offers his hand in greeting to them. Significantly though, the poet's hand is 'darkening', not only because it is twilight, but, more crucially, because he is of darker skin colour than his grandfather. His grandfather's whiteness is being progressively darkened, the blood-line progressively 'mixed'; and that is an important factor in the promise of the future.

'Verandah' was to be followed, in *The Gulf*, by 'The Train', a kind of sequel, in which the poet again comes to terms with his paternal grandfather. As he rides on a train through the English countryside, his intensely mixed feelings about his white ancestry prick him like a hair shirt. It is as if the children are doing penance for the sins of the fathers who had gone out on their colonizing mission to 'drunkenly seed their archipelago' (*G*, 24); and we note the proprietorial 'their'. However, as the final paragraph of 'The Muse of History' puts it, they were 'men acting as men' (*WTS*, 64). The poet, closing with the acknowledgement that, in England, he is 'half-home' (*G*, 24), accepts himself and his history. In the context

of Walcott's work as a whole, his condition is not peculiar to the mulatto (using the term loosely). Everyone is always only 'half-home.'

The Crusoe mask also facilitates the poet's reflections at this time on the limitations, the challenges and the virtue of the art of writing and the imagination. The persona of 'Crusoe's Journal' knows the elation of an 'Adam [who] speaks that prose / which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself / with poetry's surprise' (*CP*, 92). By contrast, the persona of 'Crusoe's Island' is anguished by the feeling that his 'skill / Is not enough' (*CP*, 71). Still, he can continue to believe in the power of the mind to 'Catch fire till it cleaves / Its mould of clay at last' (*CP*, 71). In 'The Flock', a medieval knight, resolutely pursuing his lonely quest, pushing forward through snowy wastes into the unknown dark of winter against the southbound migratory flight of birds, is the writer in his fixity of purpose, inscribing himself with his pen, his lance, across tundras of blank paper. So he appropriates the knight and the snow.

In his interview with Dennis Scott, Walcott said that the figure of Crusoe was already behind him and that what he was now interested in was seeing 'how a table looks good in the morning . . . across the table with your wife looking down on your children' (*CDW*, 16). But although there is no Crusoe figure as such in *The Gulf*, there is some carry-over from *The Castaway*. For instance, the very interest in domestic simplicities was something that, as 'Crusoe's Island' made clear, Crusoe developed and learned to value in his forced renunciation of the baggage and luxuries of the world. This interest is very present in poems like 'Homage to Edward Thomas', 'Land-fall, Grenada' and 'Nearing Forty'. The trope of separation, anyway, is never far from Walcott's reach, and the title of *The Gulf* is in the last sentence of the epigraph, taken from Defoe's book, to 'Crusoe's Journal': 'Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed' (*CP*, 92).

'THE GULF'

'The Gulf' deals with gulfs of one kind or another, including existential loneliness, but primarily with the anguish of race in the United States. This theme was in 'The Glory Trumpeter', the poem about the old black jazzman of *The Castaway*, and is in 'Blues', and

was to attain its most gut-wrenchingly personalized and yet most public expression in the title poem of *The Arkansas Testament*. The central metaphor of 'The Gulf' emerges naturally out of the fact that the persona speaks from the vantage point of an aircraft flying over the Gulf states. It takes off from Dallas' Love Field airport and that name opens the kind of field of ironies in which Walcott revels. As the jet lifts, he feels that he is being separated from earth, from familiar loved things and objects, and is as it were enacting man's desire for union with the divine. However, he is really attaining a distance from which, like the persona of 'Crusoe's Journal', he can assess the things of earth more clearly. So, the initial use of the term 'divine union' causes him to bring into sharp focus the ironically 'divine union / of these detached, divided States' (CP, 106). The warning of apocalyptic racial conflagration is fuelled by the context out of which the poem emerges, the militant Black Power uprising of the late 1960s. This in turn achieves a deep historical resonance from subtle allusion to the American Civil War.

Other separations addressed, and the attempt to bridge them, include, as in 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye', the poet's sense of separation from the common people, the sense of futility in his yearning, felt since boyhood, to 'share their lives' (WTS, 20). This poem is a reworking of 'Return to D'Ennery; Rain'. Here again, the setting is on one of St Lucia's picturesque but ramshackle fishing beaches. The 'spindly sugar-headed children [who] race' (CP, 127) up the beach towards him, seeing him only as another tourist who will toss them coins, have no idea that he had 'hoped it would mean something to declare / today, I am your poet, yours' (C, 128). He is heartbroken. Again his art seems 'not enough'.

'Exile' presents a variant of the Caribbean person's problematic relationship to home. Whereas in 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye' the persona, revisiting his home island, feels himself estranged from it, 'Exile' imagines the situation of an island immigrant who goes to England in the conviction that to arrive there will be to come home. This conviction is the product both of his sense of having been exiled to the Caribbean, in this case from his ancestral Indian origins, and the colonial education which had conditioned him to regard England as home, the 'mother country'. His feeling of unbelonging in the West Indies is therefore doubled. However,

working quietly against his idea of an arrival that completes him are, on the one hand, the environmental details in the poem which suggest his repressed unease in the new place, and, on the other hand, the memories of the Caribbean which come unbidden and which provide the subject of his writing. For the persona is a writer and, evidently enough, someone very much like V. S. Naipaul. The poem is a valuable document in the story of Walcott's lifelong concern with Naipaul's attitude towards the Caribbean. It presents a case of triple exile: from India, from the West Indies and from his chosen home, England. In the reality suggested by the poem, he is only 'one-third home'. A less ambivalent view of the Naipaul figure is to be found in 'Hic Jacet', in the acerbic reference to 'some winter-bitten novelist / praised for his accuracy of phlegm' (G, 70).

It is remarkable how many of Walcott's poems configure him as a visitor even in his homeland, a transient, passing through. 'To the Hotel Saint Antoine' tells of a visit home, when the poet and his wife stay at the then famous landmark on the historic and commanding Morne overlooking Castries.²⁵ After a day of some kind of Carnival revelry, he falls tiredly on the bed, but, while his wife sleeps, a blustery wind foraging outside becomes his restless memory haunting and haunted by the past, his lost young self, his 'dead friend' (Harold Simmons?), 'the first love [he] lost' (Anna/ Andreuille?) (G, 55). Here the poem prefigures *Another Life*, on which he was working at the time. Back home in Trinidad, lying beside his sleeping wife, who is either big with child or lying with her daughter next to her, he marvels at the ceaseless contention and cycle of life and death. And though he cannot rejoice, as he fancies the wind does, that everything must die, he can share the wind's rejoicing in the never-ending struggle between life and death, the ferocity with which the smallest particle that lives does so to the death, and life pulses up out of death: 'the grass / is the hair of some skull' (G, 56). There is some consolation, in the end, in the exchange between the dead and the living, as the former live in the dreams of the latter. There is a kind of parallel in their situations, each in his 'wooden, echoing room' (G, 56), the room in which the poet tries to sleep in the Saint Antoine, and the coffin in which the dead sleep.

The general mood and manner of *The Gulf*, the determination to cut away prettiness and illusion and to see things, not least the self,

in the harsh light of a Caribbean noon, are well summed up in 'Nearing Forty'.²⁶ It is from this vantage point of his life's noon that, in *The Castaway* and *The Gulf*, the poet assesses his life and his world. The epigraph from Samuel Johnson, which opposes 'the stability of truth' to 'fanciful invention' (*CP*, 136), establishes the site of the poem's subtly contending, interweaving lines of contemplation. The poem's meaning is reflected in its strenuous protraction of thought through its thirty-two lines, which constitute one complex, grammatically incomplete sentence, but which, nevertheless, as Wayne Brown observes, does not lose coherence.²⁷

The poet bestirs himself early on a morning of steadily falling rain, having been unable to sleep since 4 a.m. This is the rain that, as in 'Return to D'Ennery; Rain', 'seeps slowly to the core of grief' (*CP*, 68). The poet is beset by the frightening thought that his work, to which he has so assiduously devoted himself, will turn out to have been itself 'a false dawn' (*CP*, 136). If his work should prove pale and ordinary in time, that will be ironic justice, given his wish for poetry 'plain as a bleaching bedsheet under a gutter- / ing rainspout' (*CP*, 136). This thought would seem to betray a lurking suspicion of the 'style past metaphor' (*CP*, 136) for which he strove. Still, perhaps 'simple, shining lines' (*CP*, 136) would be their own reward, not just plainness, but radiant plainness. The poet imagines himself becoming, as he ages, like the 'damp match' which he now fumbles to strike, and the 'wheezing of [the] dented kettle' (*CP*, 137) which he sets going to make his cup of coffee. Clear-eyed acceptance of this condition would no doubt itself be a kind of courage.

On the other hand, he may, in spite of this fear or reality, continue to rise, as he is doing on this bleak morning, to 'set his lines to work / with sadder joy but steadier elation' (*CP*, 137). This elation seems to arise abruptly, out of sheer force of will or faith, rather than as an inevitable development out of the poem's progression up to this point. But then we see its natural genesis in the rain, which has been falling steadily as the poem progressed, and which is now metamorphosed into an emblem of commitment and fortitude, rising early (as the poet does now), moved by the influence of the new moon (symbol of poetic inspiration), to do its inescapable work even while 'it seems to weep' (*CP*, 137), as the poet, we imagine, is now weeping, as he contemplates time, mortality and the tears of things.

‘*What a man is*’: *Dream on Monkey
Mountain and Other Plays,
The Haitian Trilogy and Franklin*

From his earliest efforts as a dramatist, Walcott has undertaken a variety of forms, styles and subject-matter, these variations to some extent manifesting themselves simultaneously. There is, therefore, inevitably, a degree of expediency and arbitrariness in any attempt to impose a schema of stages or periods on Walcott’s dramatic corpus. This is compounded by the fact that it is sometimes not easy to decide where to position a play chronologically, because of the long period that may have elapsed between the first and final versions. The principle by which the plays are grouped for discussion in the present study is one that is broadly chronological, but one in which considerations of theme and form modify a strict linear chronology. This factor is further highlighted by the occasional wide gap between the time of a play’s composition or first production and the time of its being published, or published in a collection of plays by Walcott.

The plays that perhaps suggest themselves most readily as constituting an integrated group are the four in Walcott’s first published collection, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. This group, consisting of plays set in St Lucia, is instructively extended and ‘framed’ by the plays that deal with the Haitian Revolution, in particular *Henri Christophe*, which pre-dates the plays in *Dream*, and the later *The Haitian Earth*, collected, along with *Henri Christophe* and *Drums and Colours*, in *The Haitian Trilogy* (2002). Although it was not completed and first produced until 1984, Walcott had been working on *The Haitian Earth* for some years.¹

The extended group represents Walcott’s foundational contribution towards a West Indian theatre rooted in the experience of the common people, drawing on their arts of performance, including

their language, and that in the context of the colonial experience of the region. A central motive in this endeavour was to address the apparent or supposed absence of home-grown heroes for the West Indian imagination. Another St Lucian play that belongs to the period of the *Dream* plays provides a convenient addendum to commentary on the group, by way of contrast in continuity. This is the still unpublished *Franklin*.² While it also engages with the colonial legacy of the region, it shifts the focus from the identity-quest and heroic potential of the common man to the white expatriate, scion of the colonizer, in the twilight of empire, clinging precariously to the outpost he has come to love.

In chapter 12 of *Another Life*, Walcott recalls how, still a teenager, he was fired by the dream and challenged by the effort and difficulty of making a new world of art in his island(s), the challenge of what he calls, at the end of the poem, 'Adam's task of giving things their names' (*CP*, 294). The chapter begins with the memory of a carpenter, Dominic, in his 'dark shop,' shaving a length of cedar: 'I watched the vowels curl from the tongue of the carpenter's plane' (*CP*, 216). The image embodies ideals for which the young man will strive, as artist, as craftsman, ideals which the next few lines of chapter 12 elaborate. The objective was an art made out of native material, 'plain wood' (*CP*, 216), giving off 'the smell of our own speech' (*CP*, 217), and therefore taking the Caribbean artist beyond a hankering after the 'marble [of] Greece' ('Ruins of a Great House') and 'heroic palaces / netted in sea-green vines'.³ It would be an art whose integrity was in its native simplicity and naturalness.

The initial image of the shavings curling from the plane metamorphoses, through the thought of the island's forests from which the cedar comes, and the idea of the carpenter's motion as he works the plane suggesting the image of a man rowing, to incorporate the native foresters and fishermen. Then the poet exclaims:

Christ, to shake off the cerecloths,
to stride from the magnetic sphere of legends,
from the gigantic myth.
To change the marble sweat which pebbled
the wave-blow of stone brows

for the sweat-drop on the cedar plank,
for a future without heroes,
to make out of these foresters and fisherman
heraldic men! (*CP*, 217)

It was in his plays that Walcott was most directly and definitively to take the 'stride', which was a shaping movement in his attempt to realize a West Indian drama. 'To make out of these foresters and fishermen / heraldic men', instead of 'heroes', as I have remarked, 'is a succinct statement of what [Walcott] tried to do in plays like *The Sea at Dauphin*, *Malcochon*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.'⁴ The stride may be traced in the movement from *Henri Christophe* and *Drums and Colours* to the four plays just mentioned, as well as *The Haitian Earth*, even if the movement is not neatly chronological or linear. Whatever meaning Walcott may be attaching to the term 'heraldic man' arises in contrast to how he is taking 'hero'. That said, it is more than likely that 'heraldic man' will retain a trace of 'hero'.

The passage quoted above from *Another Life* is a rewriting of a passage from *MS One*. On 17 October 1965, Walcott wrote:

The powerful truth is that no shadows haunt us now. We have moved away from the magnetic sphere of legends, giant stone statues and gesturing myths. We have a past without heroes. We can look back on our servitude as natural and human without any desire for revenge. There is an answer to both Naipaul and Froude's: 'There has been romance . . .' (MS One, p. 46)

In chapter 12 of *Another Life*, Walcott records how he had been haunted by the gigantic shadows of European art and literature. By 1965 he could write confidently that he had laid those ghosts. This did not mean that he had simply rejected them, but that he could now live easily with them, in a productive working relationship that might still involve a creative tension, the kind of relationship that would eventually produce an *Omeros*.

The quotation from *MS One*, with its reference to Froude and Naipaul, helps to point up the far-reaching implications of Walcott's concern with replacing 'heroes' with 'heraldic men'. For one thing, this concern relates closely to his quarrel with history. If heroes are towering men, larger than life, then the idea of history

against which he speaks is that of history as the deeds and impact of heroes. By contrast, heraldic men would seem to be simple, ordinary persons ('foresters and fishermen'), close to the earth, the elements, who become icons representative of the generality, the common people, just as figures in heraldry, as on coats-of-arms, are symbolic, representative invariably of a group, in some cases a nation. The heraldic figure calls attention not to itself but to what it stands for. Writing about his character Malcochon, from the play of the same name, Walcott says: 'A woodcutter or charcoal burner. To me this figure represented the most isolated, most reduced, race-containing symbol . . . [T]he inherent violence or despair in a person of that type – the mad woodcutter.'⁵ Such a figure would seem to have much of the heraldic about him.

Pertinent here is Walcott's 'confession' in his 1970 essay 'Meanings,' an essay which explains his ambition as a West Indian dramatist as it had evolved up to *Dream on Monkey Mountain*:

I am a kind of split writer. I have one tradition inside me going one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, the narrative and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* I tried to fuse them, but I am still after a kind of play that is essential and spare the same way woodcuts are clean, that dances are clean, and that Japanese cinema is so compressed that gesture does the same thing as speech.⁶

We may read in this a rough equation between the heroic, the literary, classical and grandiloquent on the one hand, and the heraldic, the indigenous and the essential on the other. The dualism indicated in this passage is cognate with the dualism of Walcott's yearning for a plain style in his poetry, and his instinct for metaphorical richness and elaboration. Whereas in this passage the expansive style is identified with the literary, and the spare style with gesture and physical presence, the polarities are also played out within the field of verbal expression. His plays as a whole move between these two styles, or try to make them work together. One must also note that volubility and rhetoric as such are not alien to the Caribbean folk tradition,⁷ where they have a different colour and quality from what they have in the English literary and oratorical tradition, sometimes acting as parodic subversions of the latter.

'HENRI CHRISTOPHE'

Henri Christophe: a Chronicle in Seven Scenes and *Drums and Colours* invest (the latter less so) in the idea of the hero, the hero as great man. *Christophe*, Walcott's first substantial play, chronicles the Haitian Revolution from after the death of Toussaint L'Ouverture to the death of Christophe. The account is centred on the two dominant men of that period: first on Dessalines, and then, after he has been assassinated at the behest of Christophe, on Christophe. As the title suggests, it is very much Christophe's play.

One may note, in passing, two other outstanding Caribbean literary portrayals of Christophe: Aimé Césaire's play *La tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963) and Alejo Carpentier's novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949). Together with Edouard Glissant's play *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961), these works represent the hold of the Haitian Revolution on the Caribbean literary imagination. Comparison of the three Christophe works would be rewarding, granted that we bear in mind that Walcott's is the work of a nineteen-year-old.

In Walcott's play, the focus on the outstanding individual, the heroic hero, so to speak, is set in the epigraph to Part I, a quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

The cease of majesty
Dies not alone but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it; it is a massy wheel
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortis'd and adjoined, which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boist'rous ruin.⁸

We are on familiar dramatic ground, where the time-honoured action is the rise and fall of the great individual, the tragic hero, who towers above ordinary men, and whose fall, by reason of his greatness, brings the whole world crashing down with him.

The young Walcott, reaching after a theatre that would speak to and for the West Indies, is excited to see in Christophe a Caribbean hero in the classical Elizabethan mould: 'Full of precocious rage, I was drawn . . . to the Manichean conflicts of Haiti's history. The parallels were there in my own island, but not the heroes' (*DMM*, 11). He

speaks of 'their tragic bulk . . . massive as a citadel in twilight'. 'Their anguish was tragic', 'such heroes . . . had size, mania, the fire of great heretics' (*DMM*, 13). Nothing would have seemed amiss if Walcott had called this play a tragedy rather than a chronicle.

'Those first heroes of the Haitian Revolution,' he writes, 'to me, their tragedy lay in their blackness' (*DMM*, 12). He emphasizes that this is the central theme, and the play does advert to the race theme from time to time. However, that is not really the engine of the play's action, which is driven rather by the sheer will to greatness of the 'heroes' and, as a consequence, the passion of each, Dessalines and Christophe, to be absolute ruler, and the machinations which they practise to attain their ends. Christophe boasts, 'I am proud, I have worked' (*HT*, 91); 'I shall build châteaux' (*HT*, 74); 'I will be a king, a king flows in me' (*HT*, 68). For Christophe, history is his peer, his towering twin. His hubris is partly in his idea of his relationship to history: 'I will make history, richer than all kings' (*HT*, 62); 'It is I who, history, gave them this voice to shout anarchy / Against the King' (*HT*, 101). The ambiguity afforded by the positioning of the word 'history' in that last sentence underscores the nature of the presumed relationship.

The fascination with heroes will also mean a fascination with the grand style, in language, verse form and movement. As Walcott admitted, his 'first poems and plays expressed [a] yearning to be adopted, as the bastard longs for his father's household. I saw myself legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton' (*DMM*, 31). The grand style of *Christophe* bears witness to this yearning, but with a difference. While it will recall the blank verse of Marlowe and Shakespeare, it is not blank verse, but free verse, with a recurring suggestion of iambic pentameter within a general dissolution of the iambic beat, and often a line that is longer than pentameter. The language, for all its grandeur, is appropriately modern, the heightening due partly to Walcott's characteristic metaphorical energy, which owes something to Shakespeare.

'DRUMS AND COLOURS'

The Haitian Revolution also figures in *Drums and Colours*, and it is the subject of *The Haitian Earth*. It is instructive to compare

Walcott's treatment of the subject in the three works, not least in respect of what may be seen as the movement from heroes to heraldic men.

Drums, written to mark the inauguration of the short-lived Federation of the West Indies, is even more truly a chronicle than *Christophe*. Spanning the history of the West Indies since the arrival of Columbus, it is another vehicle ready to accommodate heroes. Walcott builds it on the story of 'four heroes' (*HT*, 123): Christopher Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, Toussaint L'Ouverture and George William Gordon, each representing a different period in the history. The first two stand for imperialism and colonialism, the last two for resistance and revolt. But there is comparatively little heroics in *Drums*. The play opens with Columbus in chains, about to be sent back to Spain in disgrace. The thematic focus of that first scene is the oppression and abuse of the native Indians by the Spaniards, as it emerges from the conversation among the Spanish sailors and one of the conquistadors, and as it is embodied in Paco, the half-caste boy fathered by a conquistador on an Indian woman. Such heroics as emerges is no more than a nimbus of nostalgia exhaled by Columbus, no longer 'Admiral of ocean, and a tamer of tides' (*HT*, 145). Scene 1 also establishes the mercenary motive of the imperial-colonial enterprise in the Caribbean, a theme that will be increasingly dominant up to the end of the Raleigh section.

The Raleigh section has more of heroics than the Columbus section. There is more than a suggestion of hubris:

Very well then, to be considered a beast!
Issue this order to the captains, Keymis.
Despite the orders of the King of England,
Despite the hypocrisy of this cunning Spaniard,
Raleigh now risks his life, his soldiers' lives,
His son's, and all the weight, experience
Of his life, to find this fool's gold and be King of it!
Burn down the Spanish fort and find Manoa . . . (*HT*, 198).

He reflects on the similarity between Columbus and himself: 'Like me, his own impetuous, rebellious nature / Offended monarchs' (*HT*, 188).

Raleigh's brief death-scene is sombre and chastening, but not grand. The emphasis is on the humbling lesson he has learned

from life, not on his greatness: 'The only wisdom, whether of single man or nation, / Is to study the brevity of this life and love it' (*HT*, 214). His exit line, as he climbs to the beheading block, is black humour: 'I have lost my head. Look. I get not even a dry laugh' (*HT*, 214).

Whereas *Christophe* begins with the news of Toussaint's death in exile, the Haitian segment of *Drums* ends with Dessalines and Christophe agreeing to betray Toussaint to Leclerc, the commander of the French forces. Although Toussaint is identified in the Prologue as one of the play's four heroes, once again classical grand heroic is eschewed in what is shown. Toussaint is presented as a good man who had the courage to do what necessity and his conscience demanded, and who, in doing so, proved himself a great leader. His compassion and even-handedness are made much of. We first see him overcome by dismay on discovering the body of Anton, mulatto son of Calixte-Breda, on whose estate he, Toussaint, had been a coachman-slave. Outstanding in war-craft, Toussaint is nonetheless the man of peace, concerned not with his own power, but with the well-being of the people after the revolution. Against Dessalines' vengeful bloodlust, he counsels: 'Revenge is nothing. / Peace, the restoration of the burnt estates, the ultimate / Rebuilding of these towns war has destroyed, peace is harder' (*HT*, 241).

Walcott gives the form of *Drums* a Caribbean touch by framing it in a popular Caribbean performance mode, a manoeuvre that he was to exploit more fully much later, in *The Joker of Seville*. The Prologue is given over to a Carnival band, led by Mano (a popular Trinidadian male nickname, but also a name suggesting 'man,' quintessential and unadorned man), and including Pompey, a calypsonian, who, by virtue of his name, is a kind of parody of the classical heroic tradition. The Carnival frame is particularly appropriate in that the play was written for presentation in Trinidad, the home of Carnival and calypso.⁹ The band sets about to ambush, playfully, a road march coming down the street, and to change the theme of the march to 'War and Rebellion' (*HT*, 119). The idea is of conscious role-playing: the episodes from history, from the stories of heroes, are to be re-enacted by the common people of the

Carnival. By implication, the people will better understand history by re-enacting it, by 'entering' it, and may even, as a consequence, exorcize its ghosts. At the same time, the performance strategy implies the appropriation of the grand historical narrative by the grassroots tradition.

Interestingly enough, the Prologue ends with a speech by the Chorus, who is also made a Carnival figure (another piece of appropriation), and who will provide the expository information and, later, the narrative links. This Chorus speaks in a high style, very much after the Shakespearean Chorus, complete with iambic pentameter. It is as if the play, when it becomes 'serious', requires a high literary style. Still, the notion of an interplay or picong¹⁰ between styles and cultures is alive, both in the fact that Pompey also performs something of a choric function with his calypso (anticipating Billy Blue of Walcott's *Odyssey*), and in the language and style in which the Chorus is introduced, when Mano says, 'Now I want a test¹¹ who could spout the Queen English' (*HT*, 121).

As we would expect, the Carnival figures return at the end to bring the play to a close by bringing it full circle, so to speak. Curiously though, they hardly engage in any direct reference to the preceding action. The Carnival group virtually takes over the play for the last two scenes as well as the Epilogue. This manoeuvre constitutes not so much a winding-up of the main action as a substantial addition to, and indeed comment on it, but in a completely contrasting mode. The play ends in a style quite different from that in which the four heroes were represented. Pompey is an anti-hero, but when he 'dies', Mano's prayer over the body refers to him as 'one significant fragment of this earth, no hero / But Pompey . . . Corporal Pompey, the hotheaded shoemaker. / But Pompey was as good as any hero that pass in history' (*HT*, 187).

'THE HAITIAN EARTH'

The foregrounding of the common people is complete in *The Haitian Earth*. This play is Walcott's most comprehensive theatrical account of the Revolution, and the primary point of view is that of the people. This point of view is sharpened to the extent that the

play draws on and alludes to Caribbean, and more specifically St Lucian folk performances.¹²

The Haitian Earth, then, is not so much about the fortunes of great men as about the fortunes of the common people. Pompey and Yette, the attractive mulatress, are carried over from *Drums*, and they are now the true protagonists, more so even than Toussaint. The tragedy is not of the individual great man, but of Haiti itself, 'the Haitian earth'. Christophe's final exit now is not that of the grand death-speech, to a crescendo of drums, which concludes *Christophe*, but of his pathetic request to be helped into bed. In a final act of egotistic ill will, he had just ordered the execution of Yette. Right after that the play ends on a countervailing note, with Pompey, simple but strong, burying Yette's body and pronouncing his uplifting benediction on her.

Pompey's final entrance, carrying Yette's body, is to a single, stark drumbeat. The general paring down of things is reflected in the relatively down-to-earth style of the play. Against Christophe's dying boast to Pompey – 'When men like you / Are tired, they will look up into the clouds / And see it [his Citadel], and take strength; the clouds themselves / Will have to look up to see it' (*HT*, 430) – Pompey replies:

It had one talk then, I remember, under the old coachman [Toussaint], and that talk was not who was king but who would make each man a man, each man a king himself; but all that change. We see them turn and climb and burn and fall down like stars that tired, and cut my hand, my head, my tongue out if you want, Your Majesty, but my life is one long night. My country and your kingdom, Majesty. One long, long night. Is kings who do that. (*HT*, 431)

In that statement, which affirms Pompey's manhood, is the gravamen of the play and the culmination of the graph of its action. Here is the true hero, a man who is a man. In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, the climactic moment comes when the Devil, trying his final deception on Ti-Jean, almost gets him to despair, in an access of grief, and to give up the struggle. The animals encourage Ti-Jean: 'Sing, Ti-Jean, sing! / Show him you could win! / Show him what a man is!' (*DMM*, 162). A central project of these plays is to explore the idea of what a man is.

The tone and motive of *The Haitian Earth*, the pared-down style, by contrast with *Drums and Colours* and even more so with *Henri Christophe*, the greater directness and 'down-to-earthness', are underscored by comparing the two versions of the one scene from *Drums* that is repeated in *Earth*. It is the scene in which General Toussaint, commander of the revolutionary forces, encounters by chance his former owner, Calixte-Breda, now destitute and on the run. One particular speech will suffice. Calixte-Breda grabs Toussaint's pistol from the table, aims it at him and cries, in both versions, 'O God, give me the strength to shoot this monster' (*HT*, 246 and 366). In *Drums*, Toussaint replies:

And do not speak to me of God, monsieur; right now
I cannot think of God. Where was God in those years
When we were whipped and forced to eat our excrement,
Were peeled alive, pestered with carnivorous ants.
Where was God? All of a sudden from your nephew's body
You have grown a delicate orchid called a conscience.
And blame the times. I have learnt to pick up a child
Limp on my sword's edge as you would lift an insect;
I have to learn this. I love this land as well as you,
But when we tried this, when we tried to love you,
Where, O chaos, where was your heart? (*HT*, 246)

In *Earth* this becomes:

God. Do not speak of God, Monsieur Calixte.
I cannot think of God. Where was God in those years
When we were shipped and forced to bear our excrement,
Were peeled alive, pestered with cannibal ants,
Where was God?
(*He sits on a camp stool, weeping with rage and exhaustion.*)
I have learnt to pick up a dead child
On my sword as you would lift an insect.
I learnt this.
But when we tried, when we tried,
Where, where was your heart? Your God? (*HT*, 366)

'Shipped and forced to bear our excrement' is less forceful than 'whipped and forced to eat our excrement', but otherwise the later version is that much more stark and riveting, with that much less rhetorical flourish.

'THE SEA AT DAUPHIN'

After *Christophe*, and for the next fifteen years or so, Walcott's foregrounding of the common people held centre-stage in his dramatic writing. The project was, in effect, to create a drama that 'would make each man a man', a 'significant fragment of the earth', 'as good as any hero that pass in history'. To the extent that most of these men are social outcasts, their claiming of their personhood is all the more significant.

Between *Christophe* and *Drums* came three plays which, taken together, show Walcott working towards realizing his 'heraldic man' and, in the process, trying to resolve the stylistic split which he acknowledged in his dramatic writing. The three plays are *The Sea at Dauphin*, first produced in 1954, and *Ione* and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, both first produced in 1957. It is not surprising that *Ione* is the only one of the three which has not been collected by Walcott. Its relative lack of success may be linked to its falling awkwardly between the two styles.

In *Dauphin*, a one-act play, Walcott's interest in the blacks of the Caribbean turned from kings and would-be kings, from men of historic moment and large ambition, to the poor and outcast. He began to shape a form for 'the naked, voluble poverty around [him]' (*DMM*, 11) in his own country, even if he could find no 'heroes'. The challenge was to see these men as men, under the duress of negotiating, affirming and maintaining the personhood and humanity seemingly denied them. To do this meant tapping into the folk consciousness and the theatrical possibilities of the folkways: 'I do find that a lot of my principal characters are heightened by the fact that they come out of the depth of a folk consciousness' (*CDW*, 44). By making these characters speak, not in a borrowed 'mighty line', but in a language derived from their native creole, with its home-grown poetic imagery and phrasing, its own earthy and proverbial authority and eloquence, he established the creole as a fit medium for serious dramatic expression.

Afa, the central character in *Dauphin*, is Walcott's first 'reduced', 'isolated', 'race-containing symbol', and, to this extent, an iconic, heraldic figure. He is both representative and different, a heightened version of the 'blasphemous and bitter' fishermen of

the coastal villages and their 'naked, pessimistic life, crusted with the dirty spume of beaches' (*DMM*, 16). Cursing the sea, circumstance and God, he is not exactly a model of goodness or of the Christian idea of the virtue of suffering. Still, he is distinguished by his intensity of feeling and expression. He speaks eloquently for 'the black, the despairing, the poor' (*CP*, 29) in a raw, salty speech that is essentially and economically poetic, even when it is cast in prose. He is distinguished too by his determination not to yield, despite his pessimistic view of the odds. Ever renewing the struggle even in the foulest weather, and putting out to sea at the end of the play, after the tragedy of Hounakin's death, he becomes a warrior figure, a version of the lonely knight putting forth on his quest, the samurai and, from the African-Caribbean folk tradition, the stick fighter.

Speaking of the plays of this stage of his career, Walcott says that, in striving for the sort of play he had in mind, he had to deal with the fact that 'what was missing in the folklore was a single heroic warrior figure . . . no king, no tribal chief, no warrior for a model'.¹³ His achievement in respect of, say, Makak (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*), would be to realize the potential for the warrior model in the 'degraded, humble, lonely, isolated figure of the woodcutter', who had in him 'some elemental force', and who, 'in another society . . . would have been a warrior'.¹⁴ Implicit here is a link between the warrior figure and 'heraldic man'. Afa's elemental quality is imaged in his identification with the sea, his adversary and *métier*: 'sea and I don't sleep' (*DMM*, 49).

Afa's fight is also with the challenges of his humanity. In his extreme cynicism and bitterness, he seeks to harden his heart and suppress love and compassion with a stubborn, foolhardy bravery. His mate Augustin berates him: 'You don't have no love, no time, no child, you have a hole where man heart should be, you have no God, no dog, no friend' (*DMM*, 51). And Gacia tells him, 'A man cannot live so. Man not a rock' (*DMM*, 78).

The compassion and tenderness that cannot be altogether suppressed by Afa's hardness are crucial markers of his humanity. The old man Hounakin functions as the test and stimulus for Afa's compassion. Himself the type of isolated, reduced man, humanity *in extremis*, he is Afa's foil. Augustin discloses how, on the night

before the action begins, Afa, in the release of rum, had cried on Hounakin's shoulder and agreed to take him on the fishing trip next morning. We see Afa fighting against what seems to him to be his weak self, which is moved to accommodate the old man. Hounakin, who stands for the 'weakness' of human love and grief, at one and the same time displaces and completes Afa as protagonist in the latter half of the play. Significantly, it is Afa who is given the moving, climactic speech at the end of the play that reports Hounakin's death. It is as if the protagonist has become both the Messenger and Chorus of Greek tragedy. But this speech is Afa's finest moment, the moment in which he becomes most fully a man and elicits decisively our compassion.

In the portrait of Hounakin, Walcott also shows his own characteristic racial compassion, all the more remarkable here because the (East) Indian presence in St Lucia was, then as now, very much a minority. Besides, there would hardly have been at that time much consideration of the comparative absence of the East Indian in West Indian writing, whether as author or as subject. Walcott's portrait of Hounakin signifies his early, deeply sympathetic recognition of the Indian diaspora, and anticipates, for example, the figures of Ramsingh and his daughter Marie in *Franklin*, 'The Saddhu of Couva' (*CP*, 372) and the account, in the Nobel lecture, of the performance of the *Ramayana* by the villagers of Felicity. This recognition is also present in the early poem 'Roots', in 'The creak of the bullock-cart, [and] / The fields with bent Indians in the rice marsh' (*GN*, 60). It is there in the crucial, benedictory chapter 22 of *Another Life*. It is part of the poet's concern for 'all the races [of the Caribbean] that crossed the water' (*CP*, 285).

Dauphin, a naturalistic play, draws briefly but memorably on the ritualistic potential of the folkways. This occurs when the play effects the transition from the early-morning moment when Afa and Augustin put out to sea while a grieving Hounakin bids them farewell and goes off home, to the closing scene when the fishermen return at evening bringing gifts from the sea for Hounakin, only to find that he has fallen, or thrown himself from the rocks and drowned. The transition is in the form of a folk lament for lost fishermen, sung by a Chorus of Dauphin women.

'IONE'

In *Ione: a Play with Music*, Walcott explores further the theatrical possibilities of folk-performance modes. In addition to more instances of singing or chanting, the play's opening scene uses the format of the storyteller/narrator and his onstage participatory/responsive audience, in this case a group of road menders taking a respite from work. This storyteller device was to be developed, with variations, in *Ti-Jean, Drums and Colours*, as we have seen, *Dream* and *The Joker of Seville*.

Ione disappoints because the story and the characters do not seem equal to the weight of the literary and classical tradition that has been put upon them. The analogy with the 'high seriousness' of classical Greek tragedy, a kind of calamity-of-the-house-of Atreus, is too clamorous of attention. When Theresine, the Tiresias/Cassandra figure, says at the end, ushering in the catastrophe, that 'tonight is the dying of everything noble' (*I*, 54), there is something of a hollow ring, since we have not seen all that much nobility.

The characters' claim on our sympathy and awe is very much a matter of assertion rather than of demonstrated virtue. Despite their boasts, their vaunting of noble lineage and family pride, they remain violently litigious peasant farmers and fishermen nursing ego, mean-spirited enmities and tawdry lust. *Ione* herself does have some commanding presence, but the character is not much developed, nor her misfortune sufficiently earth-shaking to warrant a sense of high tragedy.

The trouble may be not so much with the raw material itself as with the style in which it is dressed. The language and the verse, complete with iambic pentameter, sound too literary and high-flown, too self-consciously rhetorical, sententious and at times sentimental, as when *Ione* asks: 'Helene, small Helene, with your skin sweet as vanilla when you was small, your teeth as white as cane fresh cut, who had the nicest hair in two of us, and the river's voice, why you come to this?' (*I*, 8/9). Or, *Ione* again, in an opposite vein:

You are lying, old woman.
I am a Victorin. I will skin you alive,
And nail your dry skin on my father's house. (*I*, 11)

When Achille says, 'I am like a rock now, I cannot stand windiness' (*I*, 32), the second half of the line is itself windy. This kind of windiness is shown up at the moments when the style becomes that bit tighter, more earthy, as in some of Ione's speeches:

Because a nigger that come from God know where,
A man that stink of treachery, dust and sweat,
Calling himself in one hour, leader of men,
Stand in front me, waving a dirty paper . . . (*I*, 47)

In a speech like this, we see too how Walcott uses Ione to interrogate the arrogant, misguided idea of 'what a man is' that is held by the men in this play for the most part: 'Achille is talking to the men of my father . . . But they don't drink enough yet. When the rum finish, then to get frighten. Everybody and his brother will be brave' (*I*, 49). But Ione herself subscribes to some of the same arrogance, as witness the 'I am a Victorin' speech, and ultimately she falls victim to the patriarchal code of honour to which in some measure she subscribes. Ironically, of all the folk-based plays, it is in this one, where the central characters do not start out so degraded or 'reduced' – whether by circumstance or society or history – as do Afa, Hounakin, Chantal, Ti-Jean and Makak, that their idea of their manhood needs to be corrected: "Let the women make noise, and the children cry in their cradle, but today we will know which one of us is man' (*I*, 41). At least, though, Victorin does learn, but too late.

‘MALCOCHON’

Ti-Jean and His Brothers, written in 1957 but substantially revised in the late 1960s, *Malcochon*, written in 1958, and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, also written in the late 1950s but much revised before its first production in 1967 – these three plays, and in particular *Ti-Jean* and *Dream*, bring to a culmination Walcott's folk-based exploration of what it means to be a man, and, conjointly, his experiment in fashioning a Caribbean dramatic form. The protagonists of all three plays – Chantal the woodcutter, Makak the charcoal burner and the boy Ti-Jean – come out of the deep country, the high forests of St Lucia. In their different ways they are the most insignificant of persons imaginable, social outcasts, deprived, and, in the cases of

Chantal and Makak, seemingly subhuman. These two are versions of the wild man of the mountains, in the popular imagination more beast than man. Both are identified with wild animals. Chantal is nicknamed 'old tiger', and Makak (French *macaque*) is, of course, a 'monkey'. Ti-Jean, unlettered, inexperienced, innocent, poor, is, like them, living 'behind God back', as Afa would have said.¹⁵ The Devil's description of Ti-Jean, 'you little nowhere nigger' (*DMM*, 157), can apply equally to Chantal and Makak, who are considered ugly and mad, and who have to a greater or lesser extent internalized these judgements. All three, then, are, like Afa, striking icons of the historically discredited Caribbean person, the flotsam of history, historyless. All the more telling then, when, through the process of the plays, they find or affirm their humanity, their personhood, and command our attention as 'significant fragment[s] of this earth' (*HT*, 289).

This personhood is enhanced by being expressed in a theatrical style that draws on popular, home-grown expressive forms combining music, dance, mime and storytelling. As Walcott has said, 'The storyteller tradition is still very prevalent in the Caribbean. The chant, the response, and the dance are immediate things to me; they are not anachronistic or literary' (*CDW*, 57). So, for example, in *Malcochon* the *conteur* and the musicians dance and mime the murder of Regis as well as the deluge overflowing the banks of the river, this to musical accompaniment from popular instruments. In developing this feature of the plays, which contributes notably to their stylized, symbolic quality and relative physical immediacy, Walcott draws on congenial folk/theatrical forms and traditions outside of the mainstream English literary tradition: Irish drama (and specifically J.M. Synge for *Dauphin*), Japanese film and Noh theatre, as well as Brecht.¹⁶ Walcott's knowing syncretism reflects the general syncretism of Caribbean culture.

Adapting something both of situation and style from Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film *Rashomon*, *Malcochon* begins with the *conteur* announcing that he is about to tell the story, already well established in the folk repertoire, of the murder of Regis, a white planter, by 'Chantal the brute', when Chantal was apparently caught stealing wood from Regis' estate. However, a doubt is immediately hinted at when the *conteur* says, 'And what I tell them is the truth: / Don't

believe all you heard or read / Chantal the tiger cannot dead' (*DMM*, 171). The play becomes a whodunnit: who really killed Regis? It is left far from certain that Chantal did. In addition, the question as to what is truth, and how appearance is easily mistaken for reality, becomes a central theme of the play. These issues are played out when a torrential downpour puts Chantal in a hut along with five other persons who seek shelter from the rain: an old man and his nephew, a husband and wife, all of whom had been working in the vicinity when Regis was killed, as well as a deaf mute, Moumou. Suspicion is also raised in respect of Moumou, whose condition adds mystery to the play and heightens the importance of gesture and mime in its mode of expressing meaning.

Chantal is no angel, and makes no pretence at being one. On the contrary, he seems to play up to the popular image of himself as a brute and a tiger. At the same time, in appearing to do so with a knowing sense of role-playing, he sees through the system of privilege and exposes it, even if he cynically accepts that he is beyond the pale of redemption from it: 'All my life I just do what I want and leave the rest, / The responsibility, you follow, to the men who run the world, / The priest and the magistrate, the rich man', (*DMM*, 200). 'But blessed are they that hungry for righteousness' sake, as if they catch you stealing one green fig [banana], is praedial larceny!' (*DMM*, 176). He knows that if any crime is committed in his neighbourhood, he is likely to be the first suspect: 'God, what kind of joke you playing on Chantal? Who will believe me? An old thief? A madman' (*DMM*, 178). There is an implication that the popular image of him as a terrible threat to civil society is a construct of the popular imagination. He is a scapegoat and becomes in effect a sacrificial lamb, even, as Anthony Boxill demonstrates, a Christ figure.¹⁷ But Chantal is also, in his way, a warrior, the tiger, defying the system, however hopelessly: 'My true name is Tarzan / And just because I hawked and spat / In the eyes of the magistrate / They give me a year in jail' (*DMM*, 172). At the same time, his acquiescence in the racial stereotyping that condemns him to inferiority is apparent in his renaming himself Tarzan. It might be too much to argue that he is in fact subverting the stereotype by seeming to buy into it.

Chantal ultimately serves as an agent of ameliorative change in the other characters, making them consider their own human

weakness, face up to their guilt or exercise forgiveness, as the case may be. Using the reputation for terror and violence with which they have invested him, he forces them to confess. When Moumou stabs Chantal in the back, thinking that Chantal was about to harm the others, our feeling for Chantal is articulated, heightened by the Old Man. The others, anxious to get away from any possible association with the murder of Regis, rush to get a ride on a passing truck, only too willing to leave Chantal to die, attended only by the sly Moumou. However, the Old Man is moved with pity for Chantal, and when the latter urges him to go with the others, the Old Man says: 'No, no. Because you are my son. You are my brother. You are not the beast and the madman. No' (*DMM*, 204). This is vindication of Chantal's humanity, the recognition that he is a man. Even he, an anti-social solitary, can feel compassion for his fellow man, for the impaired Moumou who has fatally stabbed him: 'What will they do the mongoose? He cannot talk, make explanation, argue right and wrong with the magistrate' (*DMM*, 203).

'TI-JEAN AND HIS BROTHERS'

Similarly, but more emphatically, when Ti-Jean, archetypal man, eventually wins his contest with the Devil, his ultimate triumph is that the prize he asks for is not wealth or power, or even that his mother be brought back to life, but life for the Bolom, the aborted foetus. The fulfilment of Ti-Jean's humanity is in the satisfaction of seeing the Bolom transfigured into mortal life, chanting: 'I am born, I shall die! I am born, I shall die! / O the wonder, and pride of it! I shall be man!' (*DMM*, 163-4).¹⁸ In an earlier version of the play, that last sentence is 'I shall be a man!'¹⁹ The deletion of the article serves, in its small way, to underscore the point that what the Bolom rejoices in is not any sense of personal, individualistic aggrandizement, any new-found 'big-mannishness', but the fact that he has now become part of the wonder that is humanity and is able to salute Ti-Jean as 'Ti-Jean, my brother!'. And Ti-Jean welcomes him into the family of man: 'Come then, little brother' (*DMM*, 164).

This fulfilling moment of the affirmation of life and the wonderful gift of being human is the answer to the Mother's pessimistic advice to the Bolom at the beginning of the play: 'Perhaps it is

luckiest / Never to be born' (*DMM*, 96). Ti-Jean and the Bolom are intuitively aware that the blessing of being human is in being able to share another's pain and joy. As the *conteur* says, to end *Malcochon*, 'The rage of the beast is taken for granted, / Man's beauty is sharing his brother's pain' (*DMM*, 206). The Devil's problem is precisely that he is unable to experience human feelings, which, paradoxically, he is fleetingly able to do when he is undone by Ti-Jean's courageous song of thanksgiving for the gift of humanity. Ti-Jean is weeping as he sings, and the Devil, despite himself, is moved to tears:

What is this cooling my face, washing it like a
 Wind of morning. Tears! Tears! Then is this the
 Magnificence I have heard of, of
 Man, the chink in his armour, the destruction of the
 Self? Is this the strange, strange wonder that is
 Sorrow? (*DMM*, 162–3)

We think of Toussaint's tears in *The Haitian Earth*. In delivering the Devil's challenge to the brothers at the beginning of the play, the Bolom had said that the Devil was 'dying to be human', and that 'if anyone on earth / Anyone human / [Could] make him feel anger, / Rage, and human weakness, / He [would] reward them' (*DMM*, 99–100).

Walcott's reverence for life, which is the high point of the watershed chapter 22 of *Another Life*, and more particularly his grateful celebration of the bounty of what it is to be human, will become the leading theme of *The Bounty*. It finds poignant lyrical expression, most apposite to *Ti-Jean's* moment of human affirmation, in 'The Cloud' (*SG*, 9).

The understanding which Ti-Jean expresses in requesting life for the Bolom shows that he has successfully completed the quest on which he set out when he left his mother's hut to answer the Devil's challenge. His was a quest not only to find and defeat evil, but also, necessarily, to grow up, to achieve his full humanity, to know and be 'what a man is'. To do this is to find and draw upon good sense and cunning, upon the capacity for anger and rage at injustice, and for the courage to act, guided by good sense, on that anger. He must act in humility, with love for all God's creatures, on behalf of his fellow men, and with willingness to share his

brother's pain. Ti-Jean enacts the humanity and personhood of the Caribbean subject in response to the tradition of discourse that would deny him or her those attributes.

In keeping with the convention of the teleological folk tale, we are told that Ti-Jean's ultimate reward for winning the contest with the Devil is to be made the man in the moon, 'to lighten the doubt of all travellers through the shadowy wood of life' (*DMM*, 166). The little warrior, David to the Devil's Goliath, becomes a sign, an icon, heraldic man. The Frog calls Ti-Jean, in apparent compliment, 'a fool like all heroes' (*DMM*, 166). Obviously 'fool' is not being used here in the sense in which the animals jeer at Mi-Jean when he first appears, 'Look man who was a fool!' (*DMM*, 87).

Ti-Jean is an allegorical fable that is at one and the same time a kind of Morality play about the never-ending 'journey of the soul' (*DMM*, 24) between good and evil, and a review and comment on the story of the black and more particularly Caribbean person in the Western world, and the possibility of his effecting a radical change of his situation. The two strands of meaning²⁰ are seamlessly integrated, a feature characteristic of the play generally, as, for instance in the melding of the local and particular with the universal or general, or the African-Caribbean folk tradition with the classical literary tradition, or one mode of the folk expressive tradition with another.

So, for instance, the story of the three brothers setting out, one after the other, from their hut in the mist-enshrouded St Lucian mountains to challenge the Devil in order to 'make life' for themselves, is a version of the 'structure as universal as the skeleton, the one armature from Br'er Anancy to King Lear [that] kept the same digital rhythm of three movements, three acts, three moral revelations, whether it was the tale of three sons or of three bears' (*DMM*, 24). At the same time, the fact that the Devil's messenger and servant is the Bolom (*beau l'homme*, ironically?), the term in St Lucian folklore for the aborted foetus of a first pregnancy, is most appropriate to the St Lucian rootedness of the play. St Lucia being overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it is not surprising for abortion to be identified with evil in folk belief.²¹

In crafting what he correctly called his 'most West Indian play' up to that time,²² Walcott gives it a structure which nicely integrates

two folk-performance forms: storytelling and a peculiarly St Lucian piece of street theatre, the 'devil's play', a kind of masquerade, which used to be performed at Christmastime, and of which Walcott has given a detailed account in 'The White Devil: A Story of Christmas'.²³ What Walcott draws from both of these performance traditions helps, among other functions, to enhance the stylization of the play, whether in the formulaic 'crick crack' opening and close by the Frog-narrator (a variation on the *conteur* of some of the other plays already discussed), from the tradition of the crick-crack tales²⁴ of the Eastern Caribbean, or in the equally formulaic chant of the devils that brings the Prologue and scenes one and two to a spirited, mock-terrifying close. The stylization is also carried forward by the humorously stereotyped, caricature-like characters, the miming, dance, music and song, all of which have a strong colouring of folk tradition. These add to the play's elan and physical immediacy, as well as to its occasional poignant lyricism. At one with these features are the simple, clean lines of the verse, not heavy or elaborate or declamatory, but sometimes delicately heightened and normally moving between trimeter and dimeter.

The storytelling mode has a built-in theatrical quality, suggesting the lamplit doorway of the hut, the surrounding darkness, the storyteller, the children round her knees, the interaction between storyteller and audience. Walcott recreates this situation in the flesh on stage by having the Frog as the storyteller and the other animals as his immediate audience. In this way he also neatly manages the business of exposition. The animals not only provide the narrative frame for the story, but also participate in its action, whether as a kind of Chorus (providing a winsome critical perspective on mankind), or as agents of goodness (contrasting with the devils) as in Morality plays. Their presence helps to evoke the fairy-tale ambience and the mood of the timeless and elemental.

The devils' play (jab mask) provides an even more essential frame and dynamic for the action, since the whole play is an elaboration of the idea contained in the devils' chant, that of consuming the brothers (mankind). The play's tripartite structure is announced ritualistically in the chant: 'One, two, three little children' (*DMM*, 89). The plot implicit in the chant is a perfect blend of drama as conflict and drama as ritual, with audience 'participation' an

important component: the devils play not only to, but also with/against the audience. Significantly too, the idea of the Devil as one who can take and give life, as he does in the case of the Bolom, is central to the masquerade from which the chant derives, in that the Devil in that story kills one of his sons and later brings him back to life.

The music is as important an aspect of the play's West Indianness as it is of the stylization. The instrumental music is provided by simple instruments from the folk tradition: flute, cuatro, drum and cymbals. The characters are differentiated and stylized by the instrumental motifs attached to them, for example sad flute music to announce the Mother, martial music on drums, flute and cuatro to mark Gros Jean's exaggerated march and clashing cymbals for the entrances and exits of the devils. *Ti-Jean* is a play with music integral to it, rather than a musical in the Broadway sense. The songs for the most part arise naturally out of the action and carry the action forward. Together they constitute a rich repertoire of Caribbean popular/folk song forms. For instance, there is the calypso influence in Mi-Jean's 'Song of Silence' and in the song the Devil sings when he is 'in his cups'. There is the influence of work song and protest song in the cane-cutters' song and chorus ('Burn, burn, burn de cane!' (*DMM*, 149)), and of the stick-fighter's battle song in 'I go bring down, bring down Goliath' (*DMM*, 165). Then there is the hymn/gospel tradition of Ti-Jean's thanksgiving song, 'To the door of breath you gave the key' (*DMM*, 162).

The play's language covers a spectrum of West Indian speech registers, from Standard English, to Standard English seasoned by a dash of Anglophone creole whose structure is influenced by French creole, to a somewhat deeper level of Anglophone creole, to lines of straight French creole accompanied by their Anglophone translation. Comparison of an early version of the text with the published version shows major revision towards greater directness, simplicity, earthiness, vivacity, creole wit and humour. For instance, the final version of Mi-Jean's 'Song of Silence' departs completely from the Standard English sententiousness of the early version with its dominant, heavily regular iambic beat. In the process, it allows for the introduction of a calypso-type music and gesture. The use of the 'big' word 'opines' and the reference to Socrates in the later

version is not a slip in consistency on Walcott's part; it is true to the calypso tradition.

‘FRANKLIN’

Another considerable play about St Lucia which developed during the period between *Dauphin* and *Dream* is the unpublished *Franklin: A Tale of the Islands*. The setting is identified unspecifically as ‘a Windward Island in the West Indies,’ but it is evidently enough based on St Lucia. The play is a development of ‘Chapter VII’ of Walcott’s early sonnet sequence ‘Tales of the Islands’ (*CP*, 25). Both internal and circumstantial evidence suggests that the first incarnation of *Franklin*, a one-act version in mimeograph in the Library of the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, may have been written in the early 1950s, while Walcott was a student at the University College of the West Indies. In 1968, as a full-length script, it won first prize in the Barbados Arts Council’s play writing competition for three-act plays. This was substantially the version performed by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1973. It was appreciably revised for a production in Barbados in 1990. The 1990 version will be treated here as the definitive one.

Although, like the other plays considered in this chapter, *Franklin* deals with the legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean, and with its painful effects on the black survivors of slavery, it contrasts with them in two outstanding respects. As a naturalistic play, it does not exhibit the reliance on stylization, and on music, dance and movement which marked Walcott’s thrust towards a Caribbean theatre style. Secondly, the centre of attention is now the white man in the colonies at the end of empire, and Walcott presents him with critical understanding.

The protagonist is an Englishman, Captain Luther Franklin, retired merchant seaman, owner of the schooner *Franklin II*, which plies the trade routes of the Eastern Caribbean. The central challenge of the play is to present a Franklin who, with all his human frailty, and despite the antipathy that much of what he represents may evoke, can nevertheless command respect, can also be an icon of ‘what a man is’. Wounded in the Merchant Marine during the Second World War, he had retired to the island, fallen in love with

it and stayed. He had made a success of his shipping business with his first schooner, the *Franklin*, providing the basis of the economy of the village named after him. He has a thriving estate bought from a well-to-do member of the white creole class; he has his faithful black servants and his little circle of expatriate Englishmen, the 'bullyboy roarers of the empire club,' to borrow an image from 'Verandah' (CP, 89). A fine-looking man, he exudes an aura of rank and privilege, and he exercises his *droit de seigneur*, albeit with genuine concern and affection, when he takes Maria Ramsingh, an East Indian girl from the rice fields, to be his mistress.

At the same time, Franklin is something of a loser and an object of pity. He lost his English wife and his son (his only child) when the ship in which they were travelling home to England was torpedoed. Before that, he had been cuckolded by another Englishman, his good friend Major Willoughby. Now, Maria, who says that she had loved him since, as a child, she had first seen him, finds him an ineffectual lover, who takes her for granted and neglects her, spending much time drinking and gambling with his English friends at the Queen Victoria Hotel. She falls in love with Franklin's First Mate, Clive Morris, the young black man whom Franklin had made, so to speak, and by whom she is now pregnant.

These personal considerations are widened and deepened by the fact that, as the blustery Willoughby puts it, 'The natives are all fucking restless' (F, 7). Their emerging trade union activity threatens the businesses and comfort of the white landowners and entrepreneurs. Their self-assertion also manifests itself in the rebellious bitterness of Charbon, who had been a labourer on La Grenade's estate, and who claims that on his deathbed the old man had bequeathed the property to him, but Franklin had defrauded him of it. Charbon (French for 'charcoal', suggesting the flames of violent revolution) has a strong sense of himself as a victim of history, a feeling that involves a measure of self-contempt. Charbon's representative value in this drama of the pain of colonialism is summed up in Morris' observation that 'Charbon is a darkness inside all of us' (F, 31), more particularly those who are 'Friday's progeny' (CP, 72).

The play opens with a scene that elaborates the image, in chapter 1 of *Another Life*, of 'colonels in the whisky-coloured light' of sunset

'watch[ing] the green flash' (*CP*, 148). Franklin and Willoughby are on Franklin's verandah, drinking and making bets on whether one of them will be lucky enough to see the legendary green flash.²⁵ The scene is redolent of the theme of the twilight of an empire on which the sun proverbially never set. The old order is changing, and the new order that is emerging does not bode well for the likes of Willoughby and Franklin or the other Englishman, the young Methodist parson who will later join them on the verandah.

Much of the value of the scene lies in the distinctions it draws between the three men as to their responses to change. We measure Franklin by how he contrasts with the other two. Willoughby is the stereotypical John Bull, interested in the colonies only as sources of profit, and smug in his conviction as to the inferiority of the 'native'. Pritchett is the over-zealous, welfare-state missionary, making a point of 'living down' to the 'native', but not at all committed to the place, and buoyed by the knowledge that sooner or later he will move to 'somewhere safe' (*F*, 6). In the first scene, Willoughby announces his intention to leave the island; it is not worth his while to remain any longer. At the end of the play, Franklin, who *had* put down roots, accepts sadly that he is no longer welcome, and decides, regretfully but manfully, to leave. He puts his property up for sale, notifying Charbon that he is free to make an offer for it. He gives the *Franklin II* to Morris, who will now be Captain Morris. Franklin's low-key departure makes the point that sometimes the honourable thing to do is accept change, whatever the personal pain, and Franklin too earns our respect for embodying 'what a man is'.

Another area of particular interest in *Franklin* has to do with Maria Ramsingh and her father as representatives of the Indian diaspora, spawned by indenture, in the Caribbean. Ramsingh, headman of Coolie Village, is a tragic figure, unable to come to terms with the erosion of his cultural traditions, which has been a consequence of transplantation to the New World. Perhaps the most dramatically tense scene in the play is that of the meeting between Ramsingh, Franklin and Willoughby. Under the courtesy and seemingly 'cool' self-confidence with which Ramsingh engages the Englishmen, man to man, we detect his deep sense of hurt, humiliation, even obsequiousness, which will get its unfortunate revenge in his

fatal response to what he sees as his daughter's betrayal of himself and their traditions. In his depiction of the dilemma of Ramsingh and Maria, Walcott builds on his portrayal of Hounakin (*The Sea at Dauphin*) in expressing compassion and respect for the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. These virtues will also be evident in the poem 'The Saddhu of Couva' (*CP*, 372).

'DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN'

Walcott's redemptive dramatic affirmation of the humanity and personhood of Caribbean man, and indeed of the black person in the Western world, finds its most acclaimed expression in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Here he focusses on the psychological aspect of the situation and, in so doing, draws once more upon a vibrant range of popular Caribbean performance modes, which are seamlessly interwoven with contemporary stage technology and with theatrical conventions from European and other traditions.

Dream engages the black colonial psychosis. The focus is set by the epigraphs to the play's two acts, both being quotations from Sartre's 'Prologue' to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The first reads:

Thus in certain psychoses the hallucinated person, tired of always being insulted by his demon, one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments; but the jeers don't stop for all that; only, from then on, they alternate with congratulations. This is a defence, but it is also the end of the story. The self is disassociated, and the patient heads for madness. (*DMM*, 211)

Fanon himself, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, recognizing the issue of race and colour as an inescapable function of colonialism in regions like the Caribbean, identifies alienation and neurosis as consequences of the relationship between colonizer and colonized:

The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. Therefore I have been led to consider their alienation in terms of psychoanalytical classifications . . . In the man of colour there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence . . . The attitude of the black man toward the white, or toward his own race, often duplicates almost completely a constellation of delirium, frequently bordering on the region of the pathological.²⁶

Walcott makes 'the end of the story' the beginning of his play. The condition described by Fanon and Sartre is embodied in the play's protagonist, an ageing, illiterate charcoal burner, who lives in almost total isolation, without family or friends, in the rainforest of Morne Macaque, or Monkey Mountain.²⁷ The charcoal burner's 'real' name is Felix Hobain, but he can hardly remember it, so deeply has he internalized the idea of himself by which everyone else has nicknamed him: Makak, monkey, mimic man. The nickname is the seal of his dehumanization, an instance of the power of discourse to un-man him. In a half-facetious parody of the creation myth, the mulatto Corporal of Police mocks him:

In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name, so God call him man. Now there were various tribes of the ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outang, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork, and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their backbone and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind and that was the nigger.

(*DMM*, 216–17)

But despite the infection of self-contempt, Makak also has his dreams and aspirations, also has his 'angel', and therein lies his madness: 'I suffer from madness. I does see things. Spirits does talk to me. All I have is my dreams and they don't trouble your soul' (*DMM*, 225). But they trouble his. He occasionally falls into a hallucinatory fit. A beautiful white woman appears to him as a fiction of the idealism which is the obverse of his self-loathing. He kneels to her in obeisance, a perverted chivalry: 'Lady in heaven, is your old black warrior, / The king of Ashanti, Dahomey, Guinea' (*DMM*, 228). When she sings sweetly to him, he feels himself acquiring manhood: 'I feel my spine straighten, / My hand grow strong' (*DMM*, 229). Makak is an extreme case of Walcott's own 'generation [that] yearned / for whiteness, for candour, unreturned' (*CP*, 146). This dream or hallucination is a necessary process in Makak's reconstruction of self. Merely to have it, as Tejumola Olaniyan observes, is itself revolutionary, a threat to the Establishment.²⁸

When the play opens, it is Saturday evening and Makak is in jail. He had come to town to sell his charcoal at the market, had

proceeded to get drunk and to act out the destructiveness of his psychosis by wrecking the rum shop. He is thrown into jail for the night for being 'drunk and disorderly'. Under the cruel mockery of his jailer, Corporal Lestrade – the straddler, neither white nor black, but who denies all blackness in himself, the satirical prototype of the pseudo-intellectual colonial, a variation on Mi-Jean – Makak is driven inward into his trance or dream. The play becomes the acting-out of Makak's dream, which draws into itself all the characters of his actual world. The dream is purgatorial, bringing him to self-acceptance and psychic wholeness.

In the night journey of his dream, another version of the mythological quest, Makak retraces the Middle Passage and acts out the wish-fulfilment of being a king of African kings. For he must work through and work off this romantic nostalgia in order to free himself. As Fanon puts it: 'In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and my future.'²⁹

Makak must come to see in its soul-destroying pettiness his dream of magnificent revenge against all the achievements of the white world that has oppressed him. Finally, though, he must 'kill' the white goddess, whom his own mind has exalted in order to keep itself in thrall.

When Makak awakens out of his dream, it is Sunday morning. He has lived through his dark night of the soul, his harrowing of hell. He remembers his name, Felix Hobain; he knows himself. He is released from prison and from the prison of his psychosis, and he returns contented to Monkey Mountain:

Lord, I have been washed from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. The branches of my fingers, the roots of my feet, could grip nothing, but now, God, they have found ground. Let me be swallowed up in mist again, and let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up, at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal of smoke, and say 'Makak lives there, Makak lives where he has always lived, in the dream of his people.' (*DMM*, 326)

One reading of Makak's killing of the white goddess and one kind of dissatisfaction with the play's resolution would seem to stem from a failure to appreciate sufficiently that his 'revolution' is

internal, psychological. There is no reason for arguing that Walcott is *advocating* violent revolution, killing all the white people after the manner of a Dessalines. Similarly, for Makak to return to his mountain eyrie to resume life as a poor charcoal burner is not a case of Walcott's simply showing the exploited black man as accepting his exploitation when all is said and done. Makak is not acquiescing in his oppression, but accepting himself as man, without shame or sentimentality, and that is the first necessity. In his end is his beginning. For one thing, he will now be a light for his people.

With regard to character-types, Corporal Lestrade, for example, is not only the type of the symbolic mulatto. He is also a version of the petty colonial middleman who is seduced and brainwashed by the system, and then used to perpetuate the system by helping to keep the masses in check. This type also appears in other Anglophone Caribbean works as the estate overseer, or the slave driver, or the schoolteacher. But the characterization of Lestrade is not without complexity. He is a variant of Makak, but one who has a shrewd if cynical understanding of the system which he accepts and serves. This understanding suggests that he too is capable of transformation. At the end, having lived through and served Makak's dream, he can release Makak from jail with what sounds like sad compassion. His final line, unoriginal though it may be in part, carries not only a sense of chastened self-realization, but also a capacity to respond, without cynicism, to Nature's signals of self-renewal: 'Here is a prison. Our life is a prison. Look, is the sun' (*DMM*, 325).

Moustique (French for mosquito) is the colonized black who accepts totally the inferiority willed in him by the colonizer. Having no 'dream', he seeks only to cadge a mean, unethically opportunistic existence within the narrow limits of possibility set for him. He is even willing to sell the dream of his 'partner', Makak. And yet, curiously, it is Moustique who, in the climactic moment, articulates the truths that will jolt Makak out of his dream: 'Look around you, old man, and see who betray what. Is this what you wanted when you left Monkey Mountain? Power or love?' (*DMM*, 314). When Makak, drunk with the illusion of his black royalty, says, 'My hatred is deep, black, quiet as velvet', it is Moustique who retorts, 'That is not your voice, you are more of an ape now, a puppet. Which lion?'

(*DMM*, 315). Moustique becomes a goad and test for Makak's capacity to forgive.

The metaphor of madness or psychosis may be read as a paradigm for that preoccupation with dividedness of one kind or another, whether personal or cultural or social, which has energized so much of Caribbean literature – a concern with states of loss, exile, alienation, deprivation, fragmentation, void and with a countervailing vision of wholeness and community. And this dynamic informs considerations of form no less than theme. Walcott, reviewing at the beginning of the 1970s his own work in the theatre so far, said that he saw the West Indian writer's task as being that of 'making creative use of his schizophrenia' (*DMM*, 17). Perhaps we may adumbrate from the literature a poetics of derangement, so to speak, working on the notion of a continual, self-renewing process of breakdown, reassembly and becoming, a poetics which will already have had important variant forms of expression in the critical writings of Kamau Brathwaite, Walcott himself and, most elaborately and comprehensively, Wilson Harris. The play's dream structure, with its abrupt, surreal transitions, its distortions of time and its blurring of fantasy and actuality, proves an effective vehicle for the descent into the disordered psyche, and for the ideas of metamorphosis and liminal consciousness, the idea that the self-healing which the play proposes must reach into the deeps of the subconscious. All of this is consistent with the poetic quality of the play. The conception of the play, with its spare, essential style, 'as a physical poem', which Walcott posits in his 'Note on Production' (*DMM*, 208), is realized in the visual symbolism of stage set, props, lighting, costume, make-up, mask, mime, dance and folk-religious ritual. This stylization well serves the theme of the possibility of reduced, dehumanized, 'unaccommodated man' claiming his humanity.

'Is there that I born': Another Life, Sea Grapes, The Star-Apple Kingdom

By the time *The Castaway* was published, in October 1965, Walcott had been working, for some six months, at what was to become *Another Life*. By the time *Another Life* appeared, in 1973, *The Gulf* had also long been published. *Another Life* shares certain qualities with *The Castaway* and *The Gulf*, but it also inaugurates new departures in Walcott's poetry. It assimilates from the two immediately preceding collections the Crusoesque concentration on 'bare necessities' (*CP*, 92) and on positioning oneself at a vantage point of separation from which one 'appraises objects [self and world] surely' (*CP*, 92). At the same time, *Another Life* strikes a new note of exhilaration triggered by the unlocking of memory and the challenge and release of a story that was waiting to be told. The poem's success as a long narrative no doubt encouraged the smaller, but remarkable efforts represented by 'The Schooner *Flight*' and 'The Star-Apple Kingdom' in the collection titled after the latter.

The identification of Crusoe with Adam as the paradigmatic 'maker' given the privilege of creating a new world out of nothing, so to speak, finds autobiographical confirmation and illustration in the story of how the young poet-painter was 'blest with a virginal, unpainted world / with Adam's task of giving things their names' (*CP*, 294). Contemplation of this privilege brings with it a fuller, more experience-deepened statement of the poet's identification with home, its landscape and people, than we find in the early lyrics which celebrate home. This identification in turn involves new dimensions in Walcott's engagement and quarrel with history, in *Another Life*, *Sea Grapes* and *The Star-Apple Kingdom*. Now, too, we find Walcott, in his poetry of the 1970s, voicing sharp, explicit criticism of certain aspects of contemporary West Indian socio-political reality. Very

relevant to the poetry of this period are the essays 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' and 'The Muse of History', both published in the year after the publication of *Another Life*.

'ANOTHER LIFE'

In a letter dated 20 January 1969, to Robert Giroux of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Walcott wrote of the agonizing effort that he had been expending on the long poem on which he had been working for nearly five years, *Another Life*. However, he was convinced 'that it is really attempting something never achieved before, though to tell you what that is would be to know precisely what I should do with it daybreak after daybreak'.¹ What it turned out to be was something singular, a poem that is an autobiography and a novel. The elation of its formal experiment, its fashioning of something new out of a kaleidoscope of fragments of memory (to echo the title of the Nobel lecture), is instinct with the freshness of the morning of his life which the narrative recreates. If as verse autobiography it had no precedent but Wordsworth's *Prelude*, like which it may also be described as a spiritual autobiography, it is nonetheless decidedly different. As a long narrative poem it is deepened by the shadows of Homer and Dante, and may even be called a kind of personal epic, while self-deflatingly describing itself as 'pseudo-epic' (*CP*, 183). It comprises a sequence of short and relatively short poems in a way that recalls Eliot and Pound. At the same time, and distinctively, it cultivates qualities of prose fiction while remaining always a poem, and it draws knowingly on major works of prose narrative, including Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Pasternak's *Safe Conduct* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. The style ranges among a variety of tones, voices and poetic modes, and from relatively plain prose rhythms to a plangent and richly wrought music, from simple speech to metaphorical sophistication.

John Thieme has helpfully focussed on the poem's 'intertextual approach to autobiography',² noting that 'it offers a radical challenge to versions of identity predicated upon linear, essentialist conceptions of the self'.³ Interestingly enough, early in *MS One*, Walcott found himself reflecting on the nature of autobiography:

All autobiographies should be in the third person. The pretext of confession, whose real purpose is not exploring but ennobling life, is the supreme fiction . . . So the lie . . . of finding progress and illumination where there was really luck or repetition, multiplies once we begin. Henceforth 'I' should be know as 'him' – an object distant enough to regard dispassionately . . . Everything else is the old zealous heresy of thinking the self central and therefore supreme. The true autobiographer will cultivate the schizophrenic gift. This is why poets rarely write autobiographies, even in their poems. Their I, as Rimbaud, now that I remember, said: 'is someone else. Je est un autre'. (*MS One*, 9)

Another Life realizes the complex awareness only dimly sensed much earlier when, in 'Allegre', he had written that 'to find the true self is still arduous' (*GN*, 59). Walcott is himself an assiduous cultivator of the 'schizophrenic gift'; so what he sees at one moment as 'lie' may become, from another point of view, 'myth'. Very markedly in *Another Life* and 'What the Twilight Says', the 'I' of the narrator-protagonist is continually changing places with the narrated 'he'. Sometimes the 'I' and the 'he' become 'you', an intermediary between the two other selves, the 'other' face in the mirror which the self acknowledges and interrogates. This interrogation dramatizes the idea that autobiography, and all imaginative writing to the extent that it expresses an autobiographical impulse, is self-address: 'I realized that the greatest prayers were cunningly constructed forms of self-address, and that great poetry resembled [them] in this respect' (*MS One*, 80). In *Another Life* the pattern of pronoun shifts between first, second and third person is established from the outset. We move from 'I begin here again' to 'There / was your heaven!' (*CP*, 145) to 'He rose and climbed towards the studio' (*CP*, 146). The pronoun shifts, as well as the alternating of 'I' as recorder with 'I' as subject of the record, also help to establish the pastness of the past and the living process of interaction between past and present, which is both method and theme of the poem.

In becoming a poem, having started out as a prose memoir, *Another Life* was only heightening a process that had been manifest in itself from the outset, that of transforming the raw material of experience and memory into art. The greatest autobiographies are works of art in their own right and not just historical records. Roy Pascal explains that 'one demands from the best [autobiographies]

more than an account of personalities, events, and circumstances. These must become the framework, in some sense the embodiment, of the personality of the writer as a man pledged to life, and one must be set free from them as historical facts . . .⁴ *Another Life* is very much 'the embodiment of the personality of the writer as a man pledged to life'. The extent to which the poem liberates itself from historical facts qua historical facts, even while depending on them, is a function of Walcott's exploration of the concept of history, another major concern of the poem. His approach to the facts of his own life reflects his notion of 'reject[ing] the idea of history as time for its original concept as myth, the partial recall of the race' (WTS, 37). 'Partial' is a key word here. It is a significant feature of *Another Life* that the past which it evokes is only what the poet can remember. He does not try to check the factual accuracy of anything. Fact is simply what he can remember. For example, remembering the history of sickness which had plagued Government House, he says:

Up, past the chrome-green, chalet-sheltering Morne,
where, *somebody, possibly Bryan Edwards*, wrote:
'Five governors died of yellow fever in that pavilion',
were the brick barracks. (*CP*, 211, my italics)

The deliberate vagueness of the italicized phrase makes a point in terms of the idea of that truth which comes with the lapses, distortions and accretions of memory, the idea that memory itself is a creative faculty. As Walcott says, 'In time every event becomes an exertion of memory and is thus subject to invention' (WTS, 37). And Roy Pascal says, 'Memory can be trusted because autobiography is not just reconstruction of the past, but interpretation; the significant thing is what the man can remember of his past.'⁵

It follows that what has been forgotten, the amnesia of which Walcott speaks in *Another Life* and 'The Muse of History', also serves to shape the poem and the personality that it embodies. The autobiographical motive of the poem sharpened Walcott's interest in the working of memory, whether as a major factor in artistic creation or as an analogue of the artistic process, and in the nature of the truth which memory apprehends. *MS One* begins with a reflection on memory: 'Names, buildings, and imaginary existences at

fifteen or seventeen or what was I then?, have a particular colouring in memory . . . and when you revisit them you are shocked to see they never looked like that. But, as we remember them or desired them to be is the way they were. Or even, really are' (*MS One*, 1).

Working both with and against the selectivity of memory is that considered selectivity exercised by the poet in shaping a work of art out of the raw material of memory. To see this considered selectivity in action, we need only consider, for example, the fact that Walcott mentions his brother, his twin, only once (*CP*, 256), and then not by name, and in such a manner and at such a late point in the narrative as to make the reference probably seem superfluous. At the same time, mention of his brother at this point, a climactic moment in which all the poet's feelings for his island come to a head, hints that his brother may have played a larger part in his life than his exclusion from the poem would suggest. The artistic selectivity is also evident if we compare *Another Life* with 'Leaving School',⁶ the autobiographical essay which had triggered the writing of the poem.

Two comments by Walcott about his attitude to facts are appropriate at this point. He says, 'I can't give facts. I do not know where to find them, how to arrange them. The blonde hair on a young girl's forearm, I should call it "down", is more important now than the precise re-arrangement of her features, or the date that I did something' (*MS One*, 8). Again: 'I am unable to think in numerals, figures, facts. I assess an island by the sharp odour of a lime leaf cracked between two fingers. I place any page black with figures, with statistics on poverty, the death rate, the per capita income, bibliographies, charts next to the blankness of a cloud' (*MS One*, 44). And so, in *Another Life*: 'Avoid: / 1857 Lucknow and Cawnpore. / The process of history machined through fact / . . . / 1834 slavery abolished' (*CP*, 287).

Another kind of selectivity and concentratedness, working to make poetry, is evident when one compares certain prose passages from *MS One* with their final poetic transmutations. Take, for example, the opening lines of chapter 10. Here are snippets of the original prose passage:

The Roman Catholic cathedral in the fishing village of Gros Ilet, blocks the blunt, sandy main street with its grey wooden shacks on either side . . .

The fences are burdened with wild yam and love vines . . . The church itself, cream-coloured inside, is cool and echoing . . . In the church at Gros Ilet, a rigidly simple hunk of architecture which concludes the broad sandy main street of the village he painted a triptych of the Assumption . . .

(*MS One*, p.16)

Chapter 10 of *Another Life* begins:

The Roman Catholic church at Gros Ilet,
a fat, cream-coloured hunk of masonry,
bluntly concludes the main street of this village
of kneeling shacks, their fences
burdened with violet rosaries . . . (*CP*, 204)

To have the shacks 'kneeling', and the fences 'burdened with violet rosaries' instead of 'wild yam and love vines', is to add a metaphoric colouring to the description, one which, among other things, keeps fresh the poem's theme of religion, and especially the dominance of Roman Catholicism in the lives of the people.

The craft of the poem is also appreciable in the way in which the poet shapes the episodic narrative. This shaping works both with and against the intuitive art of memory. Interestingly, in *MS One* we glimpse the drama of this process as it is happening. There is evidence of Walcott transposing bits of the narrative, cutting and pasting as it were, with a view to giving it some purposive shape. But then, there comes a moment, early in the document, when he writes: 'This morning, why shift the paragraph, the thoughts link each other by their own logic' (*MS One*, 7). Still, the work went through much rearranging, excision and new inclusions, some of it prompted by copy-editors, before it became the finished product, but with the freshness of a seemingly natural movement about it.

The first three books of the poem tell, in a highly selective and economical way, the story of Walcott's life in St Lucia up to the time when he left the island at age twenty, never really to live there again for well nigh fifty years, although he visited frequently. The fourth and final book, shaped round a return visit by the poet to his homeland, presents the autobiographer at the period of writing the autobiography. This strategy makes clear the point of view from which the story of the early life is written, and the gulf between the autobiographer and his remembered life, even while it also shows

the continuity. Although the point of view from which the account of the early, St Lucian life is written is implicit in the writing, it becomes explicit in Book Four. Relevant here is a statement by another autobiographer, Arthur Keith, quoted by Roy Pascal: 'Arthur Keith is referring to faulty books when he says: "When reading autobiographies, I have often wished their authors had been more explicit about the circumstances in which they wrote."' ⁷

Book One focusses on Walcott's beginnings and early childhood, establishing the natural and social environment in which he grew up. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the whole poem, or perhaps it may be more appropriately described as an overture, not only because musical motifs run through the poem, but also because it is in its way a suite of poems, in which themes are introduced, submerged, resumed, merged and so on. The various themes are signalled in chapter 1 by way of remembered moments, events, persons. For instance, one of the major characters of the poem, Harry Simmons, is evoked, from the outset, though not yet named. He is recalled in such a way as to foreground Walcott's idea of the importance of apprenticeship to the young artist. A moon's-eye glimpse into Simmons' studio helps to signal the themes of race, colour and the interface of cultures, the imposed and the supposedly inferior, in the experience of the colonized Caribbean. These themes are sharpened in the otherwise off-hand landscape detail of 'patriarchal banyans, / bearded with vines from which black schoolboys gibbioned' (*CP*, 148). The gibbon metaphor not only brings up the idea of blacks as monkeys, and the black colonial artist as mere mimic-man, but also alludes to the kind of grand idea of history represented by Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

The remaining chapters of Book One progress by a principle both chronological and spatial. The narrative begins with memories of the poet's mother, her house and the spirit of her dead husband, which inspired the young Walcott's commitment to art. The identification of the mother with her house speaks to 'the rightness of placed things' (*CP*, 157), a measure by which all the versions of displacement and estrangement that are to come in the poem may be judged. From house and mother, the narrating gaze pans outward to take in the town and some of its tragi-comic street characters, this

in the frame of the young child learning his alphabet as well as being already enchanted by the classical mythology and bedtime stories on which he is being nurtured. Then the narrative moves to the importance of religion in the lives of the people, with the uneasy division between established religion and the proscribed and socially stigmatized Africa-based religious and superstitious practices. The inclusion of this section helps to establish a context in which the young man's 'conversion' to the Word of art will be highlighted.

Chapters 5 and 6 take us further outward, to the sea, the seagoing life of the island and, by way of a voyage down the coast in the *Jewel*, to the countryside and the country folk. Again these sequences are framed in the context of schooldays, introduced by a classroom scene in which the master asks the boys to name the great harbours of the world. We get another example of the influence of Roman Catholic paternalism on the lives of the people as we see the relationship between the peasant folk in the boat and the white priest on his way to the leper colony. We get a sweeping look at the rural society, from the 'pot-stomached, dribbling, snotted, / starved, fig-navelled, mud-baked' children, such as we had met in 'Home-coming: Anse la Raye,' and who are nonetheless 'cherubim' (*CP*, 178), to the eccentric land-barons of the old plantocracy. We also get, through the anecdote of the escapades of a neighbour, Captain Foquarde's Martiniquan wife, when her husband is away at sea, the adolescent poet's awakening to sexuality, which he will find to be deeply intertwined with art.

Chapter 7 is a fitting conclusion to Book One. In its seemingly disjointed sequence of five sections, there is a principle of order which brings to a head what has gone before and points forward to what is to come. The narrative crystallizes into three moments of intense lyricism. The first is the moment, when Walcott was about fourteen, of his 'conversion' to art and to his commitment to a lifelong service to his island and its people, the folk, through his art. The second is the moment, introduced with brilliant unexpectedness, when he falls in love for the first time, thereby announcing the love story that is to be narrated in Book Three. The third, another sharp juxtaposition, imagines the ending of the love. Fraught with a sense of the ending implicit in all beginnings, it picks up the death-notes already sounded in Book One, as in the memory of the funeral

of the young boy's coeval, Pinkie, and the idea of the ultimate fading of memory.

Having recorded in Book One his call to the sacred duty of art, Walcott describes in Book Two the single-minded effort of Dunstan St Omer, whom he renames Gregorias, his painting partner, and himself to 'name' their 'virginal, unpainted world' (*CP*, 294). '[D]isciples of that astigmatic saint' (Simmons), they 'swore, / . . . / that [they] would never leave the island / until [they] had put down, in paint, in words' (*CP*, 194) every last, neglected detail of the landscape. The account of this effort leads naturally into Walcott's recalling his problematic encounter with history, and the problem of learning from, coming to terms with and not being overwhelmed by the European culture which that history brought with it. To fulfil this effort would be in effect to redeem the historyless. Remarkable in this book, for sheer descriptive-evocative force, are the portrayal of Gregorias in his elemental vitality, the recreation of the act of painting a landscape and the narration of the imagined dash of 'the leaping Caribs'⁸ (*CP*, 213) as they hurl themselves to their deaths at the place subsequently named Sauteurs.

The recreation of the act of painting is singular in poetry. The searing truth of it makes all the more moving Walcott's feeling of having failed in the effort, and his consequent decision to concentrate on poetry. He considers that he has failed in his hope 'that both disciplines [painting and poetry] might / by painful accretion cohere' (*CP*, 200). However, the happy irony is that, even though the particular remembered effort at landscape painting may have been a failure, if there is any moment in which the two disciplines do seem to cohere it is the passage in which he describes the effort and the failure. The episode of the Caribs' heroic resistance, in its prosody, its long, galloping, breath-holding lines and with its classical resonance, constitutes the most epic-sounding passage in the poem, a moment when the nameless, the native, the otherwise lost, leap into history:

We are ground as the hooves of their horses open the wound
of those widening cliffs and the horns of green branches come
lowering past me and the sea's crazed horses the foam
of their whinnying mouths and white mane and the pelting red
pepper of flowers that make my eyes water . . . (*CP*, 213-14)

The narrative itself leaps, fancifully, into history in its transition from Book Two to Book Three, where it moves to its climactic stage with the great fire of Castries and, rising like new life out of that destruction, the flame of the young poet's love affair with Anna. Castries becomes his Troy-town burning, its personal significance deepened by reference to his grandfather's fiery suicide: 'Your ruined Ilion, your grandfather's pyre' (*CP*, 226). This book contains some of the most radiant love poetry ever written. At the same time, his reflections on that love allow him to pursue his exploration of the problematic relationship between art, imagination, memory and lived experience. In celebrating this love, he idealizes Anna, but this idealization is balanced by his awareness of it, and of the tendency of art to idealize, especially in memory. While he tries to make Anna over into something more complex than she may have been, at the same time he aspires towards her as a symbol of that very simplicity and directness of life to which he hopes that his mind, delighting in the complexities and contradictions of metaphor, will lead him.

The intimations of inevitable parting which infuse the re-creation of this love also prepare us for the actual parting which will end Book Three and the story of that other life – intimations carried by images such as those of forlorn women on railway platforms waving goodbye, and migrating herons, to which he likens Anna. Paradoxically, yet understandably and in typical Walcott fashion, it is just when the life which he has been describing seems at its fullest, its most golden moment, and when he is beginning to enjoy some celebrity as poet-prodigy, that he begins to feel strongest the compulsion to leave. His own sense of the fullness of life welling up in him chafes against the parochialism of the island, its littleness. A passage from *MS One* puts into perspective this aspect of the island artist's dilemma: 'And since the West Indian, if he is lucky, is a born wanderer, what is the price of remaining? . . . Here it is the gradual deterioration of purpose . . . From then the symptoms of paranoia begin . . .' (*MS One*, 13).

And so Book Three ends with the tense, muted goodbye scene at Vigie airport when Walcott is to fly out to Jamaica to enter the University College of the West Indies as a freshman. The final line consists, pointedly, of just the actual first names of the three major figures of the story, who have come to see him off. With this stark,

un-embellished juxtaposition, the line draws together all the poem's lines of meaning and development:

three lives dissolve in the imagination,
three loves, art, love, and death,
fade from a mirror clouding with this breath,
not one is real, they cannot live or die,
they all exist, they never have existed:
Harry, Dunstan, Andreuille. (*CP*, 257)

Granted the unequivocal assertion of 'presence' in that last line, the preceding few lines are shot through with the ambiguity and contradiction that Walcott identifies as typical of his poetry.

Between Books Three and Four is the gulf of the years and 'The Estranging Sea' (the title of Book Four). In Book Four we see Walcott looking back in disillusionment at the early, lost life. The central event here is Simmons' suicide, around which the poet builds an elegiac tribute and assessment of the man. He sees the master's final withdrawal from the city, from 'civilization', as analogous with Gauguin's self-exile to Tahiti, but also as a sign of Simmons' sense of failure, his rejection by a Philistine society. This view of Simmons is doubled by an anecdote of a beaten, broken Gregorias, himself a near-suicide. At the end of chapter 20 Walcott commits Simmons' spirit to '[h]is island forest', which he asks to 'open and enclose him / like a rare butterfly between its leaves' (*CP*, 277), Simmons having been among other things a lepidopterist.

It becomes increasingly clear through these chapters that the force and understanding with which Walcott is able to imagine himself into Simmons' experience are a function of his consciousness of the imminence of the same dangers in his own life. His elegy to Simmons is also about himself, his own fears and struggles. In chapter 21 he goes down into himself, examining his reaction to the experiences of loss and disillusionment that he has chronicled. In the process, he finds the wonder of the will to endure, and of the affirmation of life and joy, the will to rise above circumstance. And so the poem opens out into a new dimension, a kind of lyric essay, in the crucial, all-circumstance-comprehending chapter 22. In this chapter, which had been published as a separate poem under the title 'The Muse of History at Rampanalgas',⁹ and which is a sister-piece to the essay 'The Muse of History', Walcott completes the

poem's interrogation of history, a completion which provides the frame in which the self-portrait which is *Another Life* must be read, a perspective for its narration of identity.

In chapter 22 Walcott looks back at his life, and out on to his region and his world, from the vantage point of Rampanalgas, a tiny, remote, insignificant fishing village in Trinidad, a location virtually outside of history. From such a vantage point he can the better assess history. At Rampanalgas he has gone beyond history, so to speak, having come a long way from his schoolboyish notion of history as romance – 'redcoat ruminant' (*CP*, 211) – which, looked at squarely, is really history as 'gild[ed] cruelty' (*CP*, 286). In a review of Nabokov's *The Gift*, Walcott had written that 'it is [Nabokov's] reverence for life, not for history, which is so affecting ...'¹⁰ Chapter 22 enacts a process whereby reverence for history is rejected in favour of reverence for life. The chapter ends as a hymn to life. After the transfiguring glow and resolution of chapter 22, we can move all the more acceptingly to the down-to-earth, low-key opening of the final chapter, which describes a return visit by Walcott to St Lucia, a changed St Lucia, which seems to have nothing about it to inspire the elation of his youth. Yet he still carries in him the 'memory of imagination' (*WTS*, 62), and the poem can still, at its end, be fired by the 'mortal glow' (*CP*, 294) that had once lit up Gregorias and himself and their island-world.

Much of the vibrancy of *Another Life* is in its seemingly inexhaustible play of metaphor. The narrative's purposive movement through time is matched by its existence as a web of metaphor stretched across space. To adapt the spider-web metaphor from the early lyric 'A Letter from Brooklyn', 'touch a [metaphor] and the whole web will feel' (*CP*, 41). In any particular use of an image, over and above its specific meaning at that point, will be immanent all its likely meanings in the poem, so that the web of images will contain the whole poem. So, for example, in chapter 1, when the young Walcott takes his painting to Simmons for his scrutiny, 'with slow strokes, the master changed the sketch' (*CP*, 147). Here 'stroke' is simply brush stroke. However, inherent in the image is the idea that situations may change at a stroke. Soon, still in chapter 1, we read of the child praying for his 'dun flesh [to be] peeled white by [the moon's] lightning strokes' (*CP*, 149), where 'lightning' signifies

not only a whitening of complexion but also a lightning flash. Near the end of the poem, Walcott, addressing Simmons, now dead, observes the sad but aesthetically felicitous irony that when he began *Another Life* Simmons was alive, and now, by his death, he has given Walcott the way to end it: 'When I began this work, you were alive, / and with one stroke you have completed it!' (CP, 282). Here 'stroke' is the stroke of the blade with which Simmons fatally slashed his wrists, but it contains and transforms the initial brush stroke. Then comes an epiphanic moment of resolution:

O simultaneous stroke of chord and light,
 O tightened nerves to which the soul vibrates,
 some flash of lime-green water edged with white –
 'I have swallowed all my hates.' (CP, 282)

Here the stroke of music and of light is a flash of illumination, in which are metamorphosed brush stroke and death stroke.

'SEA GRAPES'

Some of the poems in *Sea Grapes* (1976) represent a carry-over of moods and themes that had been foregrounded in *Another Life*. There are poems that express disillusionment at the betrayal of Walcott's Caribbean dream in favour of the tawdry and meretricious, the tourist-oriented, as well as anger at Caribbean politicians for their role in this betrayal. There are also poems that speak of burning through this bitterness and anger to a stoic calm and light, a deep reverence for life such as was hymned in chapter 22 of *Another Life*.

In the middle of *Sea Grapes*, at its heart so to speak, is 'Sainte Lucie', a sequence of five poems, a sort of collage, which lyrically 'signs' the poet's love for his island, the narrative account of the early history of that love being *Another Life*. The sequence affirms the connection between poet and place, despite all separation, loss and disillusionment. It is deepened by the sense of guilt he professes at not having 'told [the people] enough' how he loved them when his 'young poet's eyes / [were] crazy with the country' (CP, 314). 'Sainte Lucie' also 'signs' *Another Life* in that the last poem in the sequence is a praise poem to Dunstan St Omer/Gregorias.

The first poem in the sequence, 'The Villages', evokes the derelict somnolence and stasis of the little seaside villages such as Dennerly (cf. 'Return to D'Ennery; Rain' (*CP*, 28–30)), and the poet's tremulous sense, persisting from childhood, of being on the brink of some truth that would perhaps illumine the lives of the poor, some answer to a question that itself eludes definition. The motif of an enigmatic quest, the image of a question mark suspended in vacancy, runs through Walcott's poetry.

The untitled second poem in the sequence is a litany of the countryside, its fruits and birds, the beauty of the country girls who, in their landscape, exude the same 'rightness of placed things' that the poet remembered in his mother's house (*CP*, 157). The litany is also an effort at recalling the local names of things before they slip from the poet's memory. It is no less than a recall of language: 'Come back to me, / my language' (*CP*, 310). The cry is answered at the end of the poem in as direct and final an act of self-definition as one could imagine: 'generations going, / generations gone, / moi c'est gens St Lucie. / C'est la moi sorti; / is there that I born' (*CP*, 314). The swift loop of language, modulating from Standard English through St Lucian patois to its Anglophone Caribbean equivalent, comprehends the problem and richness of identity for Walcott, and with it the West Indian drama of language.

Then, as if to confirm that his language, the St Lucian creole, has indeed come back to him, the poet proceeds to use as the next poem in the sequence a *conte*, a St Lucian folk song, transcribed first in its original French creole, and then in its Anglophone equivalent. In recovering 'his' language, the poet makes the people speak their own poetry. The song tells a story (with narrative disjunctions not uncharacteristic of the form) of common-law conjugal infidelities in the context of the economic conditions of the poor and the moral values of the community.

The final poem in the sequence, 'For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia', is a celebration of Dunstan St Omer and his famous mural 'The Holy Family' in the church at Jacmel. Walcott's poem is the completing sequel to the Gregorias story. The beaten, disillusioned Gregorias at the end of *Another Life* is now stunningly productive again. Patrick Anthony describes the mural, which covers some eight hundred square feet:

In this mural Dunstan uses the African mother-mask form for Mary's face, and smooth divinity of the African antelope's face as the form for the face of the infant Jesus. The mural is complete with rural scenery: banana-green of the valleys, fishermen mending their nets, the conchblower (symbol of the apocalyptic angel with golden trumpet!), belair dancers, chantwelle and native musicians.¹¹

The artist himself says, 'The scene is a local one with the ordinary people worshipping God with their labours and loves and dance and music . . . A new religion of Hope and Love instead of humiliation before a slave master.'¹² The poem fuses the painter, the painting and the common folk, much as the mural itself does, the artist himself even appearing as one of the figures in his painting. Poetry and painting 'cohere'. The quintessential St Lucia that emerges from 'Sainte Lucie' is the St Lucia of the countryside and the peasantry, their honest sweat, their faith and hard-earned joy of life.

Walcott's vision of the inter-rootedness of the people, the place and its art, and his mythologizing of the valley as a Garden of Eden, are deepened by his awareness of the unenviable aspects of the lives of the people: 'the valley of Roseau is not the Garden of Eden, / and those who inhabit it, are not in heaven' (*CP*, 321). The valley is a 'rich valley', but it is also a 'cursed valley', with its 'broken mules, the swollen children, / . . . the dried women, their gap-toothed men' (*CP*, 320). But the curse, the harsh reality, no less than the 'simple' faith by which the people have endured, are all part of their nobility, and if we can see them with the eyes of the artist who 'signs' them with his own faith and love, we shall be able to see 'the real faces of angels' (*CP*, 323), which is to say the faces of real angels. To glimpse the numinous in the everyday – this is an epiphany which Walcott's poetry is always striving for.

In the garden of Walcott's poem, 'on a Sunday at three o'clock / . . . the snake pours itself / into a chalice of leaves' (*CP*, 321). The serpent also appears, explicitly or implicitly, in other Eden-myth poems in *Sea Grapes*, symbolizing primarily the prostitution or betrayal of the people's labour and faith and strength of character, the 'small-islander's simplicities' (*SG*, 10). The Caribbean New World is seen as the creation of mercantilist exploitation (the slave trade and the plantation system) and a US-style neo-colonial profit motive that exploits the sweat of the Caribbean working man's brow, the

sweat which God had said would be the price he would have to pay to eat bread. 'The snake', the poet sarcastically observes, 'admired [human] labour', and so he and Adam struck (coined) a deal to 'share / the loss of Eden for a profit' (*CP*, 300, 301)

In the ironically titled 'The Virgins', the poet speaks of Frederiksted, a town on St Croix, US Virgin Islands, as 'the first freeport to die for tourism'. The poem ends with an ironic play of composite images: roulette wheels and the spinning propellers of boats taking tourists out to offshore casinos, to 'where the banks of silver thresh' (*SG*, 10). The money-raking banks also suggest, and are a perversion of, banks or shoals of leaping fish, an image of true, vibrant life. In being used to convey the idea of a 'sell-out', the silver calls to mind the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed Jesus, which latter image figures explicitly in 'The Brother' (*SG*, 23-4).

If the exploitation of the islands was begun by European interests and continued by American ones, no less culpable are the local political and socio-economic Establishment and hypocritical, self-seeking radicals. The poems which carry these ideas include poems which continue the invective of chapters 18 and 19 of *Another Life*, which belong to the same period, and with which they constitute Walcott's most directly political poems, not in the sense that they advance any ideology or party-line, but because they attack political 'conmanship' and corruption. 'Parades, Parades', first published as 'Semper Eadem',¹³ revolves round the idea that political independence has brought no real change to the lives of the people, and 'the politicians [continue to] plod / without imagination, circling / the same sombre gardens / . . . / and only the name of the fool changes / under the plumed white cork hat / for the Independence Parades' (*SG*, 29). The plumed white cork hat (pith helmet) recalls not only the white colonial Governors, but also the cork hat of the white planter as in *Ti-Jean*. 'Parades, Parades' satirizes paternalistic petty dictators and autocrats who feast on the adulation of their lackeys, the 'venal, vengeful party hacks' (*SG*, 26). 'Dread Song,' imitating a Rastafarian chant, identifies the prototypes of these 'bastard papas' (*SG*, 28) even more pointedly: 'Brothers in Babylon, Doc! Uncle! Papa! / Behind the dark glasses' (*SG*, 33). Together 'Papa' and 'Doc' signify the Haitian dictator, 'Papa Doc' Duvalier. 'Uncle' was the nickname of Eric Gairy, the would-be dictator of Grenada, while

Dr Eric Williams, the somewhat authoritarian and inscrutable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was popularly called 'the Doc'.

'Brothers' makes a link with those poems that criticize aspects of the radical movement of the time. 'The Brother', 'Vigil in the Desert' and the uncollected 'Commune' (*Tapia*, 17 December 1971, p.6), written in the early 1970s, are responses to the general upsurge of black radicalism at that time, but more particularly to the attempted Black Power revolution which nearly toppled the Eric Williams-led government. Something of the mood that produced these poems is also evident in chapter 19 of *Another Life*, the return-to-Africa section of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and in the essays 'What the Twilight Says' (1970) and 'The Muse of History' (1974). Walcott speaks out against what he sees as a new tyranny of thought being inaugurated in the name of the revolution, the suspect motives that drive it, 'the breath that is soured by envy' (*SG*, 23). He is especially exercised by what he sees as the divisiveness bred by the new cause, the general climate of suspicion and mistrust in which brother stabs brother in the back as he mouths the fetish password, the buzzword of the movement, 'brother' – 'the serpent whispering brotherhood' ('Commune').¹⁴

Whereas Walcott's caution against the new black radicalism was no doubt seen by some as reactionary, it may be better described as discriminating. Interestingly enough, the upsurge of radicalism would have encouraged his own poetic attacks on the socio-political status quo, on the corruption, venality and authoritarianism against which the radicals were reacting. The radical activity of the time may also have prompted his rhetorical self-questioning in the face of the rot that had triggered the violent response: 'Tell me / how it all happened, and why / I said nothing' (*SG*, 30).

Two of the Eden-myth poems, 'The Cloud' and 'Adam's Song', are remarkable for the way in which they advance an idea dear to Walcott, but which some may find startling, and which in the process subverts Christian orthodoxy. The idea is that the glory and the wonder of humankind, the special privilege of being human, is in the capacity of the human heart for pure feelings – for grief, pain, compassion, courage, human love and joy, and their efficacy in redeeming his ignoble feelings, from which they are inseparable. The glory and the wonder are also in the fact of

humankind's mortality and in the will to live in the knowledge of that mortality. This is the idea that is enacted in the birth-scene of the Bolom in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*; 'The Cloud' and 'Adam's Song' celebrate moments when Adam discovers his humanity, its fragility and its strength. Man becomes truly human only after the Fall; in this sense, his curse is his blessing. This idea is also present in the first section of 'Natural History' – 'The Walking Fish' – and in 'New World', in particular the first two stanzas.

In the last-named poem, the 'one surprise' 'after Eden' is 'the awe of Adam / at the first bead of sweat' (*CP*, 300). 'Bead', significantly, suggests not only adornment but prayer-bead, the sacred. Having sinned against God, man, according to the Bible, was cursed: he would eat bread only by the sweat of his brow. Far from being a curse in Walcott's view, man's sweat *humanizes* him and is a cause for awe. Presumably neither God nor the Devil ever sweats. In 'Sainte Lucie', after the peasant couple have made love in the peace of a Sunday afternoon, they 'lie in rechristening sweat'. For Walcott that sweat is an occasion for awe; that couple, any such couple, are 'the real Adam and Eve' (*CP*, 321). The 're' in 'rechristening' signifies not only another christening, but also a new kind of christening, one that revises the first christening and humanizes the couple.

In his authoritative analysis of 'Adam's Song', Wayne Brown observes that 'Eve, in impelling Adam to defy God, bestows on him *his nature as a man*. And it is in gratitude for that gift of mortal splendour that Adam sings her what he could not have sung before – his lovesong.'¹⁵ In 'The Cloud', it is after Adam and Eve have first made love – that is, according to orthodox doctrine, after they have sinned and thereby incurred the fate of death – that Adam first knows and names human tenderness. He 'drew ... his first real breath' when Eve, 'his death, / turned on her side and slept' (*SG*, 17). This is the kind of feeling that *Ti-Jean's* Devil would give anything to experience.

Critics¹⁶ have noted the relevance to *Sea Grapes* of the passage in 'The Muse of History' in which Walcott says that the 'savour' of the 'great poetry of the New World' is 'a mixture of the acid and the sweet ... It is the acidulous that supplies its energy' (*WTS*, 41). As John Thieme points out, the title poem establishes this taste and

tone. In its first two published versions, the poem had carried the title 'Sour Grapes',¹⁷ with the term 'sea grapes' in the text. Subsequent versions transposed the terms. This move effectively foregrounded the very Caribbean image of the sea grape, tree and fruit as the central symbol of the poem.

As Walcott says, 'For us in the archipelago the tribal memory is salted with the bitter memory of migration' (WTS, 41). This salting and bitterness, as the poems manifest, extends into the tawdriness, the sordidness and corruption of much of contemporary Caribbean public life. Further, the sourness and acidity are not only a public, communal reality, but also something personal, individual, which one may taste in one's particular life – in the hardships, the losses, the betrayals one has suffered, the disillusionment of ideals not realized. The savour is there in the 'ancient war / between obsession and responsibility' (CP, 297), as in the 'bitter flesh' and 'acid silence' (SG, 14) of 'Sunday Lemons' which become a symbol for 'a life / beyond tears' (SG, 15) and for a woman 'remembering / Sundays of other fruit' (SG, 14). It is there in 'the steaming hills, / the air with gossiping mosquitoes, / . . . the medicine of bitterness' (CP, 329). At the same time and in another aspect, the tartness of Caribbean experience is its tang of elation, its piquancy. In his essay 'On Choosing Port of Spain', written in the period of *Sea Grapes*, Walcott, describing his impression of Port of Spain at early morning, its sights and smells, writes that 'its true tang is acrid . . . and this is its tang: the bite of morning in a tangerine . . . That acridness is the real tropical savour . . .'¹⁸

In *Sea Grapes*, though, the elation is hard won, the tang is all the sharper because it carries with it the bitterness of experience. The 'mixture of the acid and the sweet' (WTS, 41), then, is a metaphor not just for his impression of Caribbean experience, but also for his view of life. Looked at as a whole, moving through time, his poetry is a ripening in which the bitterness is an essential ingredient. The poet-persona imagines himself a man who, on the one hand, has grown sour with experience, but who, at the same time, has grown mellow, resilient. The poetry and the man *in* the poetry ripen towards awe, humility and gratitude in the presence of life. The shape of *Sea Grapes* suggests the pattern of movement from bitterness to a mature sweetness which does not ignore the bitterness, but

incorporates and transcends it. The protagonist aspires to a condition in which he will be reconciled with all experience, where he will have earned the 'mind [that] enspheres all circumstance' (*CP*, 50). In this condition, he will 'have learnt to love black days like bright ones' (*CP*, 330).

This is the model, the ideal; the actuality is the day-to-day, poem-by-poem, uneven and unending struggle to realize it, in life and on the page. The actuality is an oscillation between seeming opposites, the effort to contain them, to get beyond them. In 'To Return to the Trees' he 'look[s] forward to age // a gnarled poet / bearded with the whirlwind, / his metres like thunder ...' (*CP*, 339). In 'Endings' he says that 'even love's lightning flash / has no thunderous end, // it dies with the sound / of flowers fading ... // till we are left / with the silence that surrounds Beethoven's head' (*CP*, 326). Such a silence, surely, is a kind of thunder.

The light that shines through the darkness in *Sea Grapes* is a muted radiance 'which comes from the depth of the world' (*CP*, 322). By it we may better appreciate the subtleties and truth of grey in contrast to 'the blazing lie of summer' (*SG*, 16). The poet sings: 'grey has grown strong to me, / ... / grey now is a crystal / haze, a dull diamond, / stone-dusted and stoic' (*CP*, 340). It is the light of 'the one love', which, 'whether we bear it for beast, / for child, for woman, or friend, / ... / ... it is blest / deepest by loss / it is blest, it is blest' (*CP*, 335). It is the love that discovers, in 'The Harvest', 'the coarsest, commonest, toughest, nondescript, / resilient violet' (*SG*, 82), after having been seduced year after year by the yellow poui's sudden, startling, profligate and ephemeral windfall of blooms. This lyric encapsulates all the characteristic moods and themes of *Sea Grapes* and is a version of the Walcottian dialogue between, on the one hand, the homely, the ordinary, the plain, the low-key and, on the other, the theatrical, the dazzling, the complex and the voluble.

'The Bright Field' brings back to mind 'Ruins of a Great House', written some twenty years earlier, and a comparison of the two shows how Walcott is continuously working over his basic themes and yet not just repeating himself. Nor does the later poem, even though it goes beyond the earlier one, supersede it. In both we see compassion getting the better of anger and bitterness. There are

similar key words and images in both: rage, compassion, great house, the tolling bell (of Donne). Both engage, but in different ways, the West Indian experience of trying to come to terms with the anguish of West Indian history, with the rage (for revenge) which that anguish excites. But whereas, in 'Ruins', the imaginative energy of the poem is concerned most with recreating the painful act of confrontation with history, in 'The Bright Field' it is most concerned with evoking the glow of the one 'dying' light which illuminates and reconciles all seeming opposites: past and present, the individual and the crowd, colonizing conqueror and colonial victim, London and insignificant, remote Balandra (on the east coast of Trinidad, close by Rampanalgas), the technologically advanced world of conveyor belt and underground railway with the pastoral, underprivileged world of cane-field and bullock cart. The compassion with which both poems end, and with which, as 'Ruins' says, everything ends in spite of rage, is more 'achieved' in the later poem. As Wayne Brown has observed, 'the voice inhabiting the pentameter [in 'Ruins'] has grown [in 'The Bright Field'] markedly less mellifluous, less declamatory, and more flexible ...'¹⁹ This development is of a piece with the increasing mastery of craft which Walcott was achieving, at this time. The flexibility and nuance with which he handles the pentameter works well with the process of rich metaphorical associations by which, in typical Walcott fashion, the poem achieves its meaning.

If some of the poems of the *Sea Grapes* period bid fair for the label 'protest poetry', it is worth noting that during this period Walcott did come under some pressure on the question of the necessity and possible primacy of protest poetry. In response to a journalist's saying that he would not consider Walcott 'a poet of protest', Walcott replied in a way that questioned the narrowness of the term 'protest poetry' in popular usage:

[W]hen you say that you don't call me a poet of protest I think what you imply is something that I have to resent in the sense that it means I am therefore someone insensitive to social conditions in the Caribbean ... If you wrote anything, a single sentence at any one point, saying these are the conditions, these are the injustices, this goes on – that immediately makes you a poet of protest. In terms of shouting, the amount of noise that you make has nothing to do with the volume of your feeling ...²⁰

'THE STAR-APPLE KINGDOM'

It was in the context of this kind of pressure that Walcott went as far as he did in the direction of protest poetry in the fashionable sense, and then stayed away from it, while not abandoning protest poetry in the wider sense as he described it. The two fairly long poems for which *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979) is most remembered – 'The Schooner *Flight*' and the title poem – are considerable forays into the socio-political condition of the West Indies, significant extensions of the poet's concern and anger at the plight of the people. The ultimate mood, though, as regards this theme, is one of disillusion, though less unequivocally so in 'The Star-Apple Kingdom'.

'The Schooner *Flight*' is one of Walcott's most popular poems. Paul Breslin and Patricia Ismond have provided substantial and helpful commentaries on it. For one thing, despite the protagonist's world-weariness, his cynicism and despair at the national condition, and the fact that he is cutting loose from the place, the poem is a spirited performance, and he remains as engaged, in his account of the situation he is leaving, as his monologue is engaging. Its appeal rests partly on the fact that it represents Walcott's most sustained use to date, in his poetry, of a West Indian creole speech, a virtuoso performance of the West Indian 'man of words', and partly on the skill of its achievement in the interplay of genres – narrative, dramatic and lyric. In its interweaving of personal and communal themes and story, the poem re-enacts, freshly and trenchantly, Walcott's quarrel with history.

The narrator-protagonist is a mulatto sailor-poet who is identified only by his nickname, Shabine, a generic pejorative, often jocular, used in Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and St Lucia (with variant spellings), 'the patois for any red nigger' (*CP*, 346), that is, anyone visibly of mixed European and African blood, like Walcott himself. This identification immediately establishes Shabine as representative, not just of his alter ego Walcott, and not even just of that particular group of West Indians as well, but also of the West Indian people as a whole, their racial and ethnic admixture and variety. So when Shabine makes his now celebrated statement of identity – 'I have Dutch, nigger and English in me, / and either I'm nobody or I'm a nation' (*CP*, 346) – he stakes a claim not only for

himself as individual, but also for the West Indian people; that they are indeed a nation, and a people in the true sense of the word, and that hybridity and heterogeneity are key factors of their integrity as nation and people. The self-deflating, tongue-in-cheek concession of the possibility of their nonentity balances the portentousness of 'I'm a nation'.

So, in section 5 of 'The Schooner *Flight*', in his dream-vision of the slave ships of the Middle Passage, when Shabine finds that his slave ancestors are 'below deck too deep' to hear his call, he asks rhetorically, 'Who knows / who his grandfather is, much less his name?' (CP, 353). The question carries a weight of sadness, the weight of all the connections that were lost in the Middle Passage. However, at the same time, and even paradoxically, it affirms a positive value – the getting beyond a constricting, divisive cultivation of lineage and racial purity.

Shabine tells how, early one morning, he slipped secretly out of Trinidad, his island domicile (and where Walcott had then been living for nearly twenty years, and from which he was soon to relocate to the United States), 'to ship as a seaman on the schooner *Flight*' (CP, 345). He gives his reasons for leaving the island, presumably permanently, which it grieves him to do, reasons which are both public and private. On the one hand, he has become disillusioned and bitter about the condition of society – the corruption of values and of politics – a corruption in which he is all too conscious that he had been, in his small way, involved, helping to smuggle Scotch into Trinidad for 'O'Hara, big Government man' (CP, 347). The name (Irish) and description imply the local hierarchy of colour, class and status. On the other hand, Shabine is being torn apart, and feeling guilty about it, by a dilemma of the heart, caught between love of his wife and children and love of his mistress. He then recounts some of his experiences on his outward voyage, and the feelings and thoughts attaching to those experiences, from which we also learn something about his earlier life. The narrative builds to a climax when a storm almost destroys the schooner and its crew. Shabine, coming out of the experience a sadder and a wiser man, invokes a blessing on the islands. The poem ends with him sailing on, to no determinate geographical destination, buoyed by a metaphysical, if ambiguous idea of the 'home' for which he yearns.

On Shabine's journey, the *Flight* passes Blanchisseuse in Trinidad, calls at or passes Barbados and Dominica, and at one point anchors in Castries harbour. In any event, Shabine tells us that he knows the 'islands from Monos to Nassau' (*CP*, 346), and one of the other sailors, who features in the poem, hails from the island of St Vincent. By its geographical manoeuvre, the poem encompasses the Caribbean and provides a nice variety of entry points into different aspects of Caribbean history and experience as well as of Shabine's life, which is a product of that history. So Shabine at one and the same time voyages both forward and outward, backward and inward. For instance, as the *Flight* approaches Dominica, a jet passing overhead, symbol of the up-to-date and of 'progress', opens 'a [cloud-] curtain [of memory and imagination] into the past' (*CP*, 355). Shabine thinks of the few descendants of the aboriginal Carib Indians who still live on the island. That night, he relives in a nightmare the atrocities done to the early Caribs by the colonizer. This is one episode in the 'nightmare of history', to borrow Joyce's phrase, out of which Shabine will 'awake'.

Walcott manages well the relationship between Shabine and himself, a point underscored by Breslin's explanation of how Walcott's revisions of the poem 'show Walcott increasing the artistic distance between himself and his persona ...'²¹ Evidence of Walcott's presence in the poem is clear enough: in Shabine's racial identity for example, in the fact that he lived his early life in St Lucia and even attended the Methodist church in Chisel Street, Castries; in his 'sound colonial education' (*CP*, 346; a pointedly ambiguous affirmation), in his marital-romantic problems. But these features are absorbed into a character that has its own distinct individuality, and is not just a thin disguise for the poet. Shabine combines in himself the contemplative, the 'dreamer' and the man of action, hard-nosed, street-smart.

The matrix of allusion to Odysseus which carries the poem is one means by which Walcott negotiates the Shabine-Walcott relationship and effects its layering of suggestiveness. The idea of odyssey invokes a whole tradition of narrative, as well as Walcott's entire career, which Lloyd Brown, among others, has described as an odyssey.²² In the title poem of *Sea Grapes*, for example, the poet-persona sees himself as an Odysseus, forever restless, forever

adventuring, torn between passion and duty. In *A Green Night* maps Walcott's mythology of archipelagoes, his 'litany of islands' (CP, 46) threaded by the 'needles' of 'strait-stitching schooners' (CP, 44). Echoes of *The Odyssey* inform chapters 5 and 6 of *Another Life*. 'The Schooner *Flight*' evokes doughty island seamen earning their manhood in the ancient love affair and quarrel with the sea 'that kills them' (CP, 347), the ceaseless wandering and yearning that are made to belong as naturally to Walcott's Caribbean as to Homer's Aegean. All the Odyssean motifs adrift on the sea of Walcott's work inform Shabine's fiction, which is his self-portrait, and anticipate the cresting of Walcott's involvement with Homer in *Omeros* and *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*. That Shabine is a poet clinches the analogy with Walcott and Odysseus at one and the same time.

Shabine's self-quest is also comprehensive and definitive in that it draws together the various genres, modes and styles that Walcott has negotiated in his poetic odyssey. For one thing, it advances Walcott's foray into narrative (and the domain of prose fiction) that had begun with *Epitaph for the Young*, was pursued in 'Tales of the Islands' and brought to major achievement in *Another Life*, and which was to take even more ambitious turns in *Omeros*, *Tiepolo's Hound* and *The Prodigal*.

The narrative impetus of 'The Schooner *Flight*' is enhanced by the episodic structure, shuttling between present, past and uncertain future, and by the racy vernacular, stylized by a flexible four-beat line, with a high percentage of anapaests, continual variation in the placing of the stresses and occasional rhyme. The overall movement also draws discreetly on the technique of the Middle English alliterative half-line made famous by *Piers Plowman* – 'In idle August while the sea soft' (CP, 345); 'as ropes in this rigging, in simple speech' (CP, 347). Also impressive are the dramatic cuts and shifts of pace and tone between episodes, from brisk passages of physical action to the lyrical-meditative rests and transports, as between the heightened language of Shabine's 'mad' jeremiad at the end of section 9 and the colloquial, spare, matter-of-fact opening of section 10.

Shabine's narrative is a dramatic monologue, incorporating dialogue and a play of voices, energized by his sense of theatre, as shown, for example, in the flourish with which, at the end of section 1, he calls attention to his 'style' and evokes an image of a rapt, expectant

audience; or in the way in which he sets the stage for his account of his fight with Vince. This is one of the many confrontations in which he becomes involved, and which climax in the conflict with the storm that images the cathartic conflicts within himself. Indeed, he sees life as conflict, as drama: 'on the one hand Venus, on the other Mars' (*CP*, 361).

The ending of 'The Schooner *Flight*' remains problematic, suggesting a paradoxical situation of simultaneous detachment and engagement. Shabine's flight is ostensibly an escape from responsibility, for although he swears that he loves his wife and his children, he leaves them, as he leaves his mistress. He ends up 'enjoying' a lonely luxury of contemplation, 'study[ing] the stars' (*CP*, 361). Still, his personal odyssey is informed by the idea of the odyssey of a people, for whom he carries a heavy weight of sad concern and love. Whether in flight or in quest, his journey into an uncertain future has had to include travelling back into the traumatic past; he must be submerged in the horrors of West Indian history, and 'get . . . the bends' (*CP*, 349) in the process. He has to experience, literally and imaginatively, the 'madness' of his and his people's history in order to achieve psychic wholeness. He also has 'to know the pain of history words contain' (*CP*, 354), which knowledge the poem rehearses. Ironically, the tongue-in-cheek 'sea bath' that he set out to take (*CP*, 346) turns out to be lustral, while his flight becomes an act of reconnection and celebration. Although he ends up alone, he nevertheless affirms the ideas of community and sharing; although he cultivates a sort of transcendental detachment in an effort 'to forget what happiness was' (*CP*, 361), he can't forget. His song, his story, his fiction of himself, he offers to his audience, his people: 'Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea' (*CP*, 361).

In the closing section of the version of 'The Schooner *Flight*' that appeared in *Chant of Saints*,²³ we may see the genesis of the title of *The Star-Apple Kingdom*'s other large engagement with history and narrative, the title poem. Shabine says, 'I now had no home, / and no destination but the star-apple kingdom / of that branched sky from which meteors are shaken / like full fruit.'²⁴ In the final version, 'branched sky' makes no reference to the star-apple. Furthermore, it is separated from the idea in 'I now had no home, / and no destination', and is used as a metaphor for the archipelago of

islands studding the Caribbean Sea. In the *Chant of Saints* version, the implication is that Shabine's only home is a transcendental place, above the travails of earth, a place of celestial trees laden with star-fruit, as a cloudless Caribbean night-sky might fancifully appear. These star fruits are themselves Caribbeanized by being called star-apples, the Jamaican name for a tree and its fruit that grow wild in the islands, and which are known as caimite in the Eastern Caribbean. Suffice it to say, then, that 'the star-apple kingdom' is a dream kingdom, unlike any earthly kingdom, most of all the depressed, underdeveloped country of which the protagonist is prime minister.

'Star-apple kingdom' also represents a beguiling, nostalgic construction of the West Indian past as a time of peace, order and beauty. But this is a false colonial dream, built on the inhumanity of plantation slavery. The poem tells of the dilemma faced by its protagonist, the benevolent if idealistic political leader of a West Indian island in postcolonial times. His dilemma is how to effect a radical change for the better in the condition of his people – without recourse to violent revolution, or, at least, draconian methods.

The protagonist is modelled on Jamaica's Michael Manley, with reference to his failed experiment in Democratic Socialism when he headed the Jamaican government from 1972 to 1980. The setting is basically Jamaica, and there are a few vivid impressions of Kingston street life and the arid conditions of the urban poor. However, the island and the protagonist are viewed in the wider context of, first, the Caribbean as a whole, and, second, 'the world that [is] equally [unequally?] divided / between rich and poor, between North and South, / between white and black, between two Americas' (*CP*, 395). The charismatic Manley is perhaps the most controversial figure in modern Jamaican politics and one must be wary of reading the poem, in the way that Patricia Ismond does, as a detailed, fact-based analysis of the Manley regime of the seventies. Notwithstanding all the points of coincidence between Walcott's protagonist and the historical figure, the dilemma of Walcott's protagonist is an abstraction from the complex considerations involved in the historical situation. Ismond is sufficiently outspoken in her reading as to refer to the protagonist freely as 'Manley'. The more useful question would seem to be, rather, and taking the poem on its own terms,

how persuasively does it imagine itself into its subject and realize the predicament it describes.

The poem's protagonist is driven by love for his people and anger at the deprivation that they suffer as the heirs of an oppressive history. He is aware of the power of the pastoral dream of his country's past as depicted in the description of the landscape with which the poem opens. But the dream, though still insidiously active, is diminished, as in the fading photograph of the Great House inhabitants of bygone times, or as the landscape is reduced to its representation in a painting or on 'a porcelain souvenir' (*CP*, 384). In any event, the landscape was always reduced, in that, in the eyes of the colonizer, it could be seen as having a place in history only as an inferior imitation of an English landscape – another case of the casuarinas and cypresses of the Barbados episode (section 6) of 'The Schooner *Flight*'. Walcott's explanation of the source of the imagined painting 'Herefords at Sunset in the Valley of the Wye' (*CP*, 384) provides a good anecdotal example that reinforces this point and shows how the colonial education system served, even indirectly, to bolster the colonial enterprise. At a reading in Port of Spain in May 1978, at which he read 'The Star-Apple Kingdom',

Walcott told the story of how, when he was a student at Mona, he travelled one day through Bog Walk, scenic valley in Jamaica, along with Professor Sherlock,²⁵ a Jamaican, and an English professor, when Sherlock observed: 'Beautiful, isn't it.' To this the Englishman replied: 'It's like a meaner sort of Wye valley.' Which means [Walcott interpreted for his audience] that the Jamaican landscape can break its ass trying but it would never quite achieve the effort required. This typifies the kind of experience we have been subjected to in every single nerve-end of our lives as colonials – a life of humiliation, even in a remark like that. So what the landscape should have done, was to have shrunk itself, tipped its hat and said: 'Sorry, Professor Crossland,²⁶ that is the best we can do today.'²⁷

Under the calm of the idyllic colonial landscape, the protagonist can hear the silent scream of the supposed non-persons excluded from the Great House family photograph: the blacks, field slave and house slave. This scream echoes down the centuries. But for most of the poem he is peculiarly unable to act, trapped in his feeling of powerlessness at the enormity of the challenge for radical change that faces him. When an old black woman, 'shawled like a buzzard'

(*CP*, 387), whispers revolution in his ear, he shrinks from her: 'she would not understand / that he wanted no other power but peace, / that he wanted a revolution without any bloodshed, / he wanted a history without memory' (*CP*, 388). One can understand the perplexity of Gloria Escoffery when she asks, 'How do we react to a leader who merely gives himself up to sobbing, "I am powerless except for love" ... Is this really tragedy or merely picturesque pathos after all?'²⁸

There is another difficulty. The protagonist has the mandate of the electorate. He is in charge. Against whom is he to conduct a violent revolution? Presumably such violence as he might use would be a matter of taking drastic measures against the forces of reaction. By the end of the poem, though, there does seem to be an indication, however ambiguous, that he has made up his mind to act. The wrinkled Black Muse of Revolution reappears to him. He has a recurrent nightmare in which he falls into an undersea world of history. His immersion is a 'baptism' in the 'history lessons' represented by all the 'drowned' figures and images from the past that he sees (*CP*, 386). Eventually, he begins to absorb the demand for strong action, even though it will necessitate, for a time at least, the exercise of a power that is non-pacifist: 'he felt his fist involuntarily tighten / into a talon that was strangling five doves' (*CP*, 391). After another night of nightmares, and after the recurrence of 'the pitched shriek of silence' (*CP*, 394), he awakens, 'lathered in anger and refreshed his love' (*CP*, 393), and goes down to breakfast. The poem ends when, with an enigmatic smile, 'he now / cracked the day open and began his egg' (*CP*, 395). This smile suggests a congruence, at last, between him and the Black Muse of Revolution. We are told that, if one could see through the dry, wrinkled skin of her face, one would see that it wore a smile that was the same as his.

Does the smile in the sub-text of the woman's face mean that she has seen the light and abandoned her call for revolution? If so, the poem has not shown the motive for this change. Or does the congruence of their smiles mean that they are meeting each other halfway? If so, what kind of action is likely to result from this mutual accommodation? The cracking open of the egg, of the day, coming as the climax of a series of images of cracking, breaking

(through, into, out of) that have run through the poem, suggests positive, decisive action on the part of the protagonist, a new beginning and possibility. And yet, the cracking open of the egg may also sound like something of an anti-climax, as if the most that our hero can manage to break open is his breakfast egg.

An outstanding feature of 'The Star-Apple Kingdom' is the strong recognition of agency in woman, and more particularly in the black, underprivileged Caribbean woman, and in respect of black resistance to oppression. In this regard, the various manifestations of this female figure are mutually supportive, whether in her symbolic metamorphoses as the Muse of Revolution, or as 'La Madre Dolorosa, / ... black rose of sorrow' (*CP*, 388), or in the natural woman out of whom they metamorphose: 'the head-tie mother, the bleached-sheets-on-the-river-rocks mother / the gospel mother, the t'ank-you-parson mother / who turns into mahogany, the lignum-vitae mother' (*CP*, 392). She had been there in 'The Almond Trees', primarily as a force of survival, sustenance and creativity through the Middle Passage and slavery, but now she asserts herself in the postcolonial, post-independence struggle. The recognition of her as agent is underscored by the poet's 'confession' that she is the one 'to whom / we came late as our muse, our mother' (*CP*, 392). Ismond argues that the Muse-of-Revolution figure is 'a total abnegation and travesty of all womanly and humanly attributes in the ethos of revolution'.²⁹ One knows Walcott's consistent and outspoken horror at violence and war, and his consistent warning against the cultivation of revenge. Still, the dread female of 'The Star-Apple Kingdom' is not so easily dismissed as mere travesty, and a rigid opposition between the 'womanly' and the 'manly' is open to question. As Ismond herself notes, the female figure in the poem, in her incarnation as 'the head-tie mother', becomes, no less than Afa, Chantal, Makak and Ti-Jean, a race-containing symbol, an icon. And if Walcott seeks to find in such the warrior figure, why should woman be denied this status? There is no suggestion that Walcott is seeing the fighting Maroons in a derogatory light when he has the soul of his protagonist walk their mountain tracks. Nor is there in the allusion to Nanny, legendary Maroon warrior-leader, who is the other face of the black Nannies who wet-nursed the children of the slave-masters (*CP*, 384).

Walcott's excursion into narrative takes a novel turn in 'The Star-Apple Kingdom', whose formal and stylistic indebtedness to Gabriel García Márquez' novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch* Walcott was only too happy to acknowledge. The Márquez mode was appropriate to Walcott's subject, the interior drama of a powerful but lonely ruler, although the fact that Walcott's protagonist is otherwise quite the opposite of a Márquez tyrant may have put some strain on Walcott's adoption of the mode. What with its dream-vision, sometimes nightmarish sequences, the mode lends itself to a magic realist treatment. This, combined with the long periods, with an emphatic accumulation of parallel clause and phrase structures pulsing onward, reflects the weight of care and circumstance with which the protagonist has to cope. Ultimately, the poem may seem to have its reason-for-being more in its nature as a homage to Márquez' genius than in anything else. This powerful but idiosyncratic style is not typical Walcott, and perhaps it is no wonder that he has not returned to it.

Most of the other eight, shorter poems in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* variously extend the themes of political power and history. In 'Preparing for Exile' (*Sea Grapes*), in the context of the unwholesome political regime Walcott was castigating in some of the other poems of that time, he imagined the terror of a police-state and his being forced into exile as Osip Mandelstam, the great Russian poet, had been. At one level, this poem may have been a rationalization of his feeling it necessary to leave the Caribbean, as he was to do soon enough. This would be exile only in the loose sense of the word. By the time he writes 'Forest of Europe', he has met an exile in the strict sense of the word, the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, who was to become his close friend, and he was able to enter even more intensely into the terror of Mandelstam. 'Forest', a tribute to Brodsky, affirms the power of poetry against political power: a humble, plain but sacramental force of human goodness against the impersonal, dehumanizing power of political systems: 'what's poetry, if it is worth its salt, / but a phrase men can pass from hand to mouth? // From hand to mouth, across the centuries, / the bread that lasts when systems have decayed' (*CP*, 377).

'Egypt, Tobago', alluding to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, imagines a man lying with his lover after love-making, in quiet

Tobago, far from the 'corridors of power.' The man's post-coital torpor is a metaphor for the fact that he is tired of the great weight of power – political, imperial – that he wields, and grateful for the respite afforded by the release of erotic, loving energy. Watching the childlike innocence and beauty of the sleeping woman elicits from him an access of loving tenderness which humanizes him and constitutes a comment on his political power. He achieves a kind of epiphany rather like that of the protagonist of 'The Cloud' (*Sea Grapes*). As Benjamin DeMott says, 'the poem's ultimate achievement is the creation of an experience of heroic suspension, an interval during which exploitative power is immobilized by a perception of its own emptiness ...'³⁰ In 'Koenig of the River', the Conradian, Kurtz-like protagonist, ghost-king of his outpost of an already decaying empire, poles his canoe forlornly but resolutely up-river, acting out his obsessive imperial mission, even though he cannot remember exactly what it was. Like the planter-types recalled in chapter 6 of *Another Life*, he is claimed by the fiction of his own life (*CP*, 181): 'If I'm a character called Koenig, then I / shall dominate my future like a fiction' (*CP*, 380).

'The Sea Is History' encapsulates in a narrative of images Walcott's ideas about history. The poem finds an invaluable gloss and companion-piece in a statement by Walcott in his interview with J.P. White:

Nothing can be put down in the sea. You can't plant on it, you can't live on it; you can't walk on it. Therefore, the strength of the sea gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd ... And by history I mean a direction that is progressive and linear. With the sea, you can travel the horizon in any direction, you can go from left to right or from right to left. It doesn't proceed from A to B to C to D and so on ... The sea does not have anything on it that is a memento of man. (*CDW*, 158–9)

CHAPTER 5

The challenge of change: the dramatist after Dream

Walcott's quest for a West Indian drama that would affirm the personhood and humanity of the common people, and in a style which draws crucially on popular expressive and performance modes, was for all practical purposes fulfilled in *Ti-Jean* and *Dream*, with their stylized, poetic representation of the burden of history inherited by 'the black, the despairing, the poor' (*CP*, 29). This achievement produced one kind of answer to the apparent absence of West Indian heroes.

However, from his earliest dramatic efforts, Walcott had shown a penchant for variousness of theatrical subject-matter and form. So, as we have seen for example, from before *Ti-Jean* and *Dream* took centre-stage, he had been writing *Franklin*, a 'straight' naturalistic play. Moreover, as early as *Franklin*, we find a quite different kind of play, *The Charlatan*, Walcott's first musical play, in the vein of light comedy and even farce. After going to live in Trinidad at the end of the 1950s, Walcott, not surprisingly, developed the Trinidadian, carnival-calypso features of the play, which was eventually performed by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop along with *Franklin* in their 1973-4 season. Like *Franklin*, *The Charlatan* was never published.

The mode of light comedy leaning towards farce was taken up again in *Beef, No Chicken*. On the other hand, the success of *The Joker of Seville*, with music by Galt MacDermot, who had done the music for *The Charlatan*, encouraged Walcott in his pursuit of the musical (as distinct from the play with music) and of Broadway. Then, granted Walcott's privileging of verse drama, there came major prose plays like *Remembrance* and the two-hander *Pantomime*. Later, the adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* provided a special challenge to Walcott's stagecraft and enhanced his theatrical range.

Trinidad and Tobago becomes a major source and setting for plays after *Dream*, but the settings also range from Jamaica to the USA, to Haiti and to Homer's wine-dark sea. In the plays of West Indian setting, the post-Independence socio-political situation, including the fortunes of the colonial legacy and the shifts of power, is an area of recurrent thematic interest. Virtually all of the plays deal, in one way or another, with the challenge of change: the capacity and will to effect desirable change, however painful, or to resist undesirable change, or the good sense and maturity to accept and make the best of inevitable change.

'THE JOKER OF SEVILLE'

The two plays in *'The Joker of Seville' and 'O Babylon!'* (1978), first performed, by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, in 1974 and 1976 respectively, followed close on the success of *Ti-Jean* and *Dream* and together represented a major foray by Walcott into the form of the musical. The first masterstroke of his adaptation of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*) is the conceiving of it as a musical. This allowed for the action to be carried by an ebullient variety of Caribbean, largely folk, largely Trinidadian music, memorably scored by Galt MacDermot. The Trinidadian features felicitously accommodate and revise Tirso's story about the libertine transgressions and final punishment of the legendary Don Juan. In his 'Note' to the play, Walcott says that 'Trinidadian music and its public character' easily represented 'the wit, panache, the swift or boisterous élan of [Tirso's] period' (*JSB*, 3-4), and that the cultural reality of Spanish Trinidad was ready ground for the adaptation. So when, for example, a Trinidadian audience hears that the performance of Rafael and his troupe is taking place in the village of San Juan, and hears Rafael speak of Valencia, or Octavio of 'sea-green hills the crossing gull / called Santa Cruz' (*JSB*, 121), they will think first of places so named in Trinidad.

If part of the pleasure of the theatrical experience is to be transported to the courtly society of seventeenth-century Seville, a crucial aspect of that pleasure is that we are always aware that we are in a Seville and a Naples that are being *performed* and signified upon

by contemporary Trinidad. Performance, role-playing, with the self-reflexive delight of it, is itself a distinctive part of *The Joker's* appeal. This delight in 'playing mas' is the spirit of the Trinidad Carnival, with its performance of a ritual letting go, breaking loose, breaking down, transgression of boundaries, a celebration of life in the face of death. From the very beginning of the play, the cemetery, with the statue of Gonzalo, is on stage, a reminder of the death and retribution which will come to life, so to speak, at the end, as agent of Juan's punishment. Walcott's *Joker* 'carnivalizes' Tirso's *El Burlador*, even though in the end Juan is to be punished as in the original, but not before he has made his own serious, subversive point.

By making the action generate itself out of a frame or space of Caribbean folk performance, Walcott extends the strategy he had used to good effect in plays like *Drums and Colours*, with its frame of a Carnival band, and *Ti-Jean*, with its frame of the storytelling performance of the Frog and his participatory animal audience. When *The Joker* opens, we are in a makeshift arena in a field outside a Trinidad village. The arena may be imagined as a bull ring or a cockpit or most directly as a gayelle, the Trinidadian name for the arena in which the once-popular but proscribed Trinidadian martial folk art of stick-fighting was practised. All of these activities involve contests, jousting, sport, but deadly sport. Don Juan's sexual adventuring is being presented as game, role-playing, joke. Both 'cock-fight' and 'stick-fight' carry sexual connotations, and a 'stick-man' is not only a man trained in stick-fighting, but also, in Trinidadian slang, a man of great sexual prowess. Male sexual prowess is much lauded in Caribbean folk tradition, and is a favourite subject for the word-play of calypso, as in The Mighty Sparrow's 'Village Ram'.

Into the gayelle comes the village elder, Rafael, leading a troupe of villagers. It is All Soul's Eve and they have come to perform their annual re-enactment of the legend of Don Juan. In effect, the villagers are about to become a Carnival band 'playing a Don Juan mas'. Tirso's story is being revised as spectacle, historical costume drama and delight in extrovert role-playing. So the music, the singing, the dancing, the movement will generate themselves easily out of this naturally theatrical situation. The idea of game or sport is also conveyed by the suggestion of another kind of role-playing, the idea that the villagers are acting out a game of cards, in which

Don Juan is the Joker and the Ace is Death, since death aces us all in the end. The necessary use of mask and disguise in Juan's effecting of his tricks and in the working out of the resolution, the presence of a statue that will come alive, of characters that die and return as apparitions, all of this lends itself to the Carnival mode.

The Carnival spirit may also be felt in the way in which Walcott revises Tirso's moral lesson to produce his own meaning. For Tirso (pseudonym of Gabriel Téllez, a devout priest) the story makes it plain to a corrupt society that sin will in due course be punished by God, unless timely repentance brings absolution. Juan is a deceptively attractive agent of the devil, who seizes the imagination of his victims and of society, and exploits their own proclivities for transgression, by the sheer superhuman energy of his charm, his will and his cunning. Walcott's Juan is a rather more complex, if not complicated figure, to the extent that he is something of a hero with a mission for change. It is a modern mission, that of liberating the minds of women and the mind of society itself, with its strictures of a patriarchal theology and moral code, a patriarchy with which women conspired in their own repression under the banner of a chivalric code that idealized them.

Like Tirso, Walcott exposes the hypocrisy, double-standards and self-serving expediency with which society upholds the letter of the law while tacitly condoning infractions of it. This view of things is consistent with the rereading of the Adam and Eve story in 'The Cloud' and 'Adam's Song' as discussed in chapter 4. This aspect of what Juan represents is lyrically expressed in his song to the heart (which is at the same time part of his trickery, his seductive game), and more particularly woman's heart, at the end of Act One, Scene 7. After his 'macho' assertion that he will not be dissuaded from seducing Ana, he sings: 'Oh, little red bird, / In your cage of ribs, tremble, / tremble and wait, and he will come now. / The sky has no gate, the open air is your temple, / every heart has the right / to its freedom' (*JSB*, 68). Ironically, it is through overmastering by the male, the 'tiger with a rose between its teeth' (*JSB*, 68) that the trembling bird of woman's heart will find its freedom.

In the long run too, the moral code has to be reaffirmed, however smugly and hypocritically, and Juan must pay the price of violating it. Some justification is provided by his admission that he has no

capacity for love, that, in a sense, he has no heart. Besides, he is tiring of his mission, his cheerless triumphs of trickery. The last trick is played on him. Scoffing at death, affirming that 'His legend is the living air, the wind / that pries the room of every shuttered mind' and that he is 'Immortal and defiant with desire' (*JSB*, 145), he is nevertheless terrified when he realizes that the grip of the stone statue is fatal. However, as he dies, he sings a song of resurrection, of his soul 'Ascending through the air, / like smoke from a dead candle slowly flying' (*JSB*, 147). We are left with the ambivalence in the Ace of Death's question as to whether 'Juan gone down to Hell / or up to Heaven' (*JSB*, 150). Perhaps the answer is 'neither'. It would seem that Walcott's argument seeks to break out of the prison of conventional moral-theological imperatives and, as Rafael sums up the action's meaning, to see Juan's life as one principle or force in the never-ending cycle of death and rebirth in nature: 'we lit his ritual death and ritual / resurrection on All Souls' Eve' (*JSB*, 150).

Looked at in this way, Walcott's Don Juan is not a character one can subject to nice analysis as to motive and response, psychology and plausibility, as one may subject, say, Albert Jordan of *Remembrance* or Sheila Harris of *A Branch of the Blue Nile*. Commenting on such details of the action as 'may violate certain concepts of decency within the period that they come from', or which may defy plausibility, Walcott says, 'On the level, I think, on which the play is intended, these questions are not relevant. They are a matter of changing costume. Their credibility lies on the level of legend or make-believe.'¹

'O BABYLON!'

The first production of *O Babylon!*, by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in March 1976, followed close enough on the success of *Joker* and showed Walcott setting his sights more and more determinedly on Broadway and the musical.² Otherwise, *Babylon* is quite a different play from *Joker*, in subject-matter and mood. In contrast to the carnivalesque high jinks and iconoclasm of *Joker*, *Babylon* tells a sad story of class injustice in the postcolonial Caribbean. It augments the critique, evident in *Another Life*, *Sea Grapes* and *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, of the local socio-political establishment and its

betrayal of the common people in the name of development and in collusion with foreign 'big business'. The scene is Jamaica in the mid-1960s, and specifically a shanty settlement of squatters on 'captured' land adjacent to Kingston harbour. The settlement is home to a group of Rastafarians, the counter-Establishment religious, back-to-Africa movement, which was then still subject to much middle-class misunderstanding and hostility.

The play opens with the gangland-style shooting of Rufus Johnson by four motorcycle-riding hit men, referred to here as 'Dreadlocks'. Rufus is a marijuana pedlar who has also had convictions for assault and armed robbery, and the shooting is obviously an act of reprisal. Rufus is not otherwise presented as a 'bad' person at any point in the play and no doubt he is to be regarded as the unfortunate product of an unjust and corrupt social system. The leader of the materially deprived Rastafarian community, who goes by the nickname Sufferer, and who ekes out a living by buying and selling empty bottles, plays the Good Samaritan. He takes Rufus home and, with the help of the Brethren, nurses him back to health. He persuades Rufus to exchange the criminal life for the Rastafarian faith with its slogan of 'peace and love'. Rufus' initiation into the faith as Brother Aaron allows Walcott to expound some of the basic tenets and history of the movement.

Rufus exchanges his weapon, the razor, for the woodcarver's chisel and begins to work on a carving of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The apocalyptic dream of the destruction of 'Babylon' is twinned with a belief in the return to Africa, to the Promised Land of Ethiopia. The Rastafarian beliefs and lifestyle in themselves represent a bold change from the mores of the wider society.

The plot develops around two contending imminent developments. The first is the arrival of the Emperor Haile Selassie, whom the Rastafarians regard as God, on a state visit to the island. The second is the eviction of the Brethren and other residents from the settlement, the land having been acquired by foreign investors for the erection of a luxury hotel. Ironically, the 'developers' operate under the name of the New Zion Construction Company. The Brethren (or, as they would say, the I-dren) excitedly expect the Emperor's visit to facilitate or even ensure their glorious return to Africa. At the same time, there is the question of how to resist the

forces of divisive, destructive assault on the settlement, and their further deprivation. In both matters the unscrupulous, self-serving politician plays a crucial, cynical hand. The plot is so managed that Aaron, angered at being excluded, because of his criminal record, from the three hundred to be chosen for the return, reverts to violence and sets fire to the warehouses of the New Zion Construction Company. The exploitative neo-colonial interests of the capitalists win out. Aaron is jailed for three months. The settlement is destroyed and the Brethren sadly dispersed. There is a glimmer of renewal when Aaron and his common-law wife, Priscilla, decide to go to Pinnacle, a mountain-top retreat and headquarters of the movement, 'to build again' (*JSB*, 271).

Babylon on stage did not have nearly the success of *Joker*,³ and perhaps the reasons are not far to seek. On the face of it, the Rastafarians should provide for a compelling theatrical experience, with their colourful costumes, their distinctive rituals and mythology, their own distinctive Jamaican-African based music, and the strong Rastafarian influence on Jamaican popular music of the second half of the twentieth century. True, there is no dearth of action, some of it explosive, as in the opening scene of the 'drive-by' shooting of Rufus by the Dreadlocks on their motorcycles, or the later 'war dance' (a questionable introduction in terms of truthfulness to Rastafarian behaviour). There is also some of the Rastafarian rhetoric portending Jah's destruction of Babylon.

For a start, though, Galt MacDermot did not reproduce reggae as infectious as he had calypso. More importantly, the Rastafarians are not realized as a force to be reckoned with, as having potential for far-reaching effect on the wider society. Despite some semblance of their rhetoric of defiance, they appear ultimately as ineffectual, escapist victims of an unjust system, for whom one feels pity more than anything else. It is unlikely that any real-life Rastafarian, let alone a leader, however economically deprived, would construct himself as 'Sufferer.' Rude Bwoy, the brash, rising pop star from the community, is essentially a contrivance to direct sympathy towards the Rastafarians, this in lieu of their sufficiently commanding our respectful belief in them by any demonstrated inner force. The fact that the protagonist is an ex-criminal recently converted leaves him, for the convenience of the plot, too susceptible to

relapse. Nor does it help that the oppressors of the Rastafarians, represented by Deacon Doxy (the politician), Dewes (the town planner) and Mrs Powers (Chairwoman of the Rastafarian Rehabilitation Committee), are, especially the two last-named, such crass caricatures of prejudice and materialistic values.

The play also misses out on the energy and inventiveness that characterize Rastafarian speech, 'dread talk', and on their zeal and self-confidence in face-to-face 'reasoning', which commands attention even when one is most resistant to their ideas. In his prefatory 'Note', Walcott writes, somewhat defensively, about the difficulty he faced in dealing with Rastafarian language in the play. He ends by saying that for the language of the Rastafarian to reach a wider audience (a Broadway audience?) it 'requires translation into the language of the oppressor. To translate is to betray. My theatre language is, in effect, an adaptation and, for clarity's sake, filtered' (*JSB*, 156). It may seem that there has been too much filtering, with the result that one might have little or no sense of what has been filtered.

There is a problem, too, in imagining the Walcott who is so committed to a locally rooted, West Indian identity, and who wrote so sharply, in 'What the Twilight Says', about what he saw as futile nostalgia for an 'African pastoral', now imagining himself into this aspect of the Rastafarian agenda. Early in the play, Aaron, in the process of his conversion, sings an eloquent song describing his dream-vision of black horsemen, 'the Knights of Bornu' (*JSB*, 167), riding across the ocean towards him, coming 'To claim their brothers, / To bring them home' (*JSB*, 166). Walcott reproduces this song, lyrical and yet epic in its reach, as a separate poem in its own right in *Sea Grapes*, entitling it 'The Dream'. Interestingly, though, immediately preceding it is 'Dread Song', another product of the experience of writing *O Babylon!*. Moving to a reggae beat, the poem voices harsh criticism of the black politicians who 'downpress' their black brothers, but it ends on a note of despondency and hopelessness, the sentiment that nothing will change: 'more talk of the River / that wash out my name / let things be the same / forever and ever / the faith of my tribe' (*SG*, 34). The play ends with Aaron and the Brehren chanting themselves into '[t]heir vision of [a] glorious Zion', perhaps more hope than expectation: 'Zion a' come someday' (*JSB*, 275).

'REMEMBRANCE'

The two plays in *'Remembrance' and 'Pantomime'* (1980) extend Walcott's exploration of the legacy of colonialism, with significant attention to the interface and clash of cultures and values, and the attendant psychological drama of self, whether in the colonized or the colonizer. The sense of the generation gap, of the end of empire and of inexorable change is theme and dynamic in both plays. Now, though, Walcott extends his range, in that the human Caribbean subject is not the most materially and socially deprived – charcoal burner or subsistence fisherman. The protagonist of *Remembrance*, first performed in 1977, is Albert Perez Jordan, a retired schoolmaster who lives in Belmont, a traditionally middle-class area of Port of Spain. The headline of Judy Stone's review of the 1979 Trinidad production called attention to a significant broadening of Walcott's dramatic canvas: 'At last, masterpiece on the middle class'.⁴

Walcott had created a middle-class protagonist a good while earlier, in Bemminger, District Officer for the Quarter of Dauphin, in the unpublished *The Wine of the Country*.⁵ To some extent Bemminger anticipates Jordan. Bemminger's assistant, Williams, describes him scathingly as 'A black Englishman. A mongrel of a mulatto, / A freckled spaniel licking their dead creeds, / Which he calls civilization and I call disease'.⁶ The overheated style of these lines is typical of the play and in keeping with its tendency towards lurid colours and heavy brush strokes in the depiction of character and action. Jordan is more nuanced, more complex, more maturely drawn. The portraiture is an equivalent of Walcott's celebration of the subtleties of grey in 'To Return to the Trees' (*CP*, 339–41). Interestingly enough, although *Remembrance* is in prose, it exudes a poetic feeling. Stone observes, 'It is in the form of *Remembrance* that the poetry lies, in a rhythmic recurrence of the Remembrance motif with an elegant form. . .'.⁷ In addition, Jordan is characterized by, among other qualities, his feeling for poetry.

In his programme note to the 1979 Trinidad production, Walcott says that the play 'was written in honour of great teachers [he] had the privilege of knowing in [his] boyhood. . .'. However, the play is much more than a straightforward act of homage. The challenge of change that confronts Jordan, the clash of values and traditions that

his story represents, is underscored by the fact that he has had to live through the trauma of Trinidad and Tobago's so-called February Revolution of 1970, in which his younger son was killed as a guerrilla on the Black Power revolutionary side. Jordan cannot accept the fact that a son of his could have run so counter to his father's values and example. Unable to face the reality of the change that his son's political choice represented, Jordan tries to blot all memory of it from his mind. He refuses to accompany his wife and his other son on their annual visit to the grave. Jordan's repressed agony is deepened by the probability that it involves a guilty sense that he was partly responsible for his son's fate, in that the son was revolting against what the father stood for.

Jordan's attempt to erase memory only serves to underscore the power of memory and the necessity of remembrance. If he refuses to celebrate the Remembrance Day of the uprising – a revision and subversion of the traditional Remembrance Day for those who had given their lives for the British Empire in two world wars – the play is Walcott's remembrance tribute to Jordan and other teachers of his generation for whatever was admirable in the ideals and values, however contested, which they inculcated in their students. The play insists, against the fashion that would see such homage as reactionary, that there was much to be respected and honoured in what such teachers upheld. To come to terms with the colonial past is not a matter of simple rejection.

The interconnected themes of memory, remembrance and change are skilfully engaged by the play's structure. It is the seventh anniversary of the February Revolution. Ezra Pilgrim, newspaper editor, has sent a young reporter to interview his long-time friend Jordan for a feature on his life. The play unfolds as Jordan speaks his life, as he remembers it, into the tape recorder, sign of technological progress characterizing a present in which Jordan is uncomfortable. His technical-aesthetic concern that the striking of the grandfather clock might spoil the recording also symbolizes his desire to stop the inexorable press of time. His coruscating sarcasm is a sign of his sense of failure, a snapping back at the world. The business of the interview allows the play to slip easily back and forth in time, dramatizing the difficulty of self-possession that Jordan experiences in this movement. It is all too easy for him to lapse into the comfort

of the remembered past, rather than face the challenge of being out of place in the present.

Jordan's recollection of his life is in effect a process of self-invention. The difficulties that emerge in the process are ironic exposures of flaws in the invention. The portrait is all the more convincing and human by virtue of the flaws, the inconsistencies and contradictions. These also account in some measure for the play's humour, as, for example, in the matter of language. Although Jordan prides himself on having stoutly defended the King's English, when the play opens and he is speaking to the young journalist preparatory to the interview, he speaks 'naturally' in Trinidadian dialect. However, when the young man says, 'Lemme erase', he pounces on the loose English and becomes the old schoolmaster: 'Not "lemme erase", boy! Let me erase.' But then he goes on, 'You write for Ezra Pilgrim's paper and is so all you does talk?' (*RP*, 6). It may be that Jordan is speaking Trinidadian in order to ridicule it, at least to some extent. If so, the fact remains that he is using it to communicate effectively and showing it to be perhaps even more natural to himself than Standard English. In any case, the two registers are contending, or happily interacting, as defining aspects of the one persona and history.

Self-invention implies role playing. We assume roles for ourselves and proceed to act them out. Is there ever an 'I' separate from the role(s) I take on? If there is, in what sense is it not itself a role? Success and satisfaction in life will be a function of how well we realize those roles, and of any tensions among them. Jordan's very name with the omnipresent middle name which distinguishes him from the other characters, projects a sense of self-importance. When he begins to recall his heyday in the classroom, he visibly puts on his favourite, most self-flattering role. But the more self-regarding and histrionic that role-playing becomes, the more it may slip into 'pappyshow'.⁸ Jordan was a bit of a pappyshow from the beginning, with the boys chorusing behind his back, 'Jordan is a honky-donkey white nigger man!' (*RP*, 8). When, in *Another Life*, Walcott speaks bitterly of those, 'the dividers,' who 'pronounce their measure / of toms, of traitors, of traditionals and Afro-Saxons' (*CP*, 270), Jordan would be a prime candidate for inclusion in that group, not to mention Walcott himself to the extent that he can consider a Jordan deserving of honour.

The idea of one's own life story as a fiction which one constructs and which claims one, is extended inversely when Jordan recalls the two short stories that had earned him a small local reputation as a writer. As he acts out these stories, it becomes clear that they are fictions of his own life. When the interviewer asks, '[C]an we say that the work of Albert Perez Jordan was his life?', Jordan replies, 'It is a fiction. I always added a little truth to my stories' (*RP*, 9). 'It is fiction' speaks more truly, more wisely than Jordan may think.

The funny, near-farcical 'Barrley on the Roof' satirizes the crass, naive American neo-colonialism that has proven only too seductive to the postcolonial Caribbean. By the same token, though, it underscores how deeply Jordan has been imbued with the British colonialism which formed him. At the same time, in the differences between Jordan and his son Frederick over the business which generates the plot, the story provides another example of how incapable Jordan is of coming to terms with the present and the future. 'My War Effort' shows how Jordan's acculturation by British colonialism heightened his romantic feeling for the English woman, Esther Hope, when they worked in the same office during the war. At the same time, that acculturation was also responsible for the failure of nerve which made him unable to declare his love for her.

The blurring of fact and fiction, of fantasy and reality is foregrounded when a young American woman, with a baby, walks off the street and into the Jordans' lives. Albert's fantasy seizes on her as the chance to complete, vicariously, his aborted relationship with Esther Hope, by seeing her and Frederick get married. This latter section of the play writes large the frustrated romantic in Jordan, albeit his kind-heartedness as well, and brings his daydreaming to a head. The play becomes, in this section, somewhat self-indulgent in its romanticism, and the focus shifts too much away from Jordan towards making Anna, the American, into the protagonist, without sufficient dramatic justification.

The problem of whether Walcott is justified in asking us to take a deep interest in Anna's character only highlights the far more memorable portrait of Jordan's wife, the taken-for-granted (by him), un-romantic, down-to-earth Mabel. She is a triumph of female portraiture by Walcott, standing impressively outside of the angel-or-whore dualism within which many of his female characters

may seem to fall. A bit of a lovable shrew, Mabel commands our respect and sympathy without any appeal to glamour or sentimentality. By being who she is, she helps us to assess Jordan clearly. At the same time, by her dogged no-nonsense affection and care for him, evident even in her unwearying readiness to make him look squarely at himself, she ensures our sympathetic understanding of him. When, at the end, she tells him, '[Y]ou was argumentative stupid, and a stubborn man, but you was a king to me' (*RP*, 84), the force of her statement recalls Linda Loman's 'Attention must be paid', spoken of her Willy in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In that moment we recognize that Mabel is a queen; and when she says 'I tired now, I going' (*RP*, 84), the elegiac chord sounds as much for her as for Albert.

Jordan fades out reciting, with the shades of his students, the opening lines of Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard', which thread a structuring motif through the play. As darkness closes round him, it is not vainglorious to recognize that he too is a 'mute, inglorious Milton', given his just recognition by Walcott and, whether they know it or not, by the schoolboys reciting after him – a man who, in the right circumstances, might indeed have come to public notice.

'PANTOMIME'

Pantomime is very much a play about role-playing, with the emphasis on 'play' for most of the action. The idea of making sport of a serious matter – the question of whether colonizer and colonized are locked forever in the stasis of their given roles, superior and inferior – is a refreshing way of dealing with the matter, in the spirit of the Jamaican saying, 'to take bad something make laugh'. The play is set in Tobago, the island on which legend has it that Robinson Crusoe was shipwrecked. The immediate setting is a small hotel owned by an Englishman, Harry Trewe. It is off-season, and the hotel is closed for repairs. The only persons on site are Trewe, a loner who has more or less severed his connections with family and home, and his Man Friday, Jackson Phillip, who works as a waiter in the hotel during the season, but is otherwise Trewe's butler and handyman. Their situation, one of isolated close proximity, will lend itself

to the heat that will be generated when the play that is to ensue gets rough.

Trewe, trying to find fresh ideas for after-dinner entertainment for the guests during the coming season, hits upon what he considers the bright idea of doing a Robinson Crusoe skit, in music hall style, in which the fun will derive from the reversal of roles. The white Trewe will play the 'native' Friday, while the black 'native' Jackson will play Crusoe. Just a lark, of course. However, the serious import of this effort becomes increasingly clear, to the point of deadly earnest, the more they play around with improvising the play. It is to the point, and part of the fun, that both men are stage performers – Trewe a small-time music hall player, and Jackson a small-time calypsonian. So the play will become a contest, a *picong* of performance styles, music hall versus calypso, which will encapsulate the traditional clash and interplay of cultures in the colonial experience. There is a vivacious mix of literary and cultural allusions. *Aladdin and His Wonderful Vamp* (with its parodic allusion within allusion), *The Seagull*, the film *The Magnificent Seven*, the nursery rhyme 'Fee fie fo fum' – these are played off in good humour against 'Good Friday Bohboleë', with its layered puns, and the maniacal, subversive laugh of the calypsonian who created for himself the persona of The Mighty Shadow. This allusion to Shadow lends a comic resonance to the idea of the revenge of the demonized Other on his creator, the colonizer. Inevitably, the master cannot shake off Makak, the dark side of his own consciousness that haunts him. Ultimately, the play may be seen as reconciling the two styles within itself. The result is itself a metaphor for Walcott's preferred view of Caribbean culture.

Very much to the point also is the fact that, in their normal working relationship, Trewe and Jackson are a replay, however modified, of the Crusoe–Friday tandem, and an example of how, despite the end of colonial rule, it persists. Trewe, like Franklin, is a kind of voluntary castaway, severed from wife and child and native hearth, and in love with his tropic isle. Like Franklin too, and like Crusoe and Prospero, he is in his way lord of the isle. He enjoys privilege and material comfort not enjoyed by the generality of the locals. Characteristically, Trewe, a white foreigner, owns the hotel, and Jackson is his servant. Trewe takes his master role for granted, and wears it easily. Jackson takes *his* role as given; he knows his

place, but from behind his mask he assesses the master shrewdly and has a sense of the chinks in the armour of the master's role.

Much of the fun derives from the parody of classics of the 'great tradition' of English literature – not only *Robinson Crusoe*, but also Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' – that results from the liberties which the unlettered Jackson takes with them. We are amused too at how easily, and pointedly so, the composure of both men cracks under the challenge of the jesting. All of this contributes to the overall ironic, self-reflexive humour in the play's contemplation of its own nature. When Trewe is becoming annoyed at what appears to be the over-serious import of the extremes to which Jackson seems to wish to take their 'play', he counsels Jackson that 'it would be very boring, and what we'd have on our hands would be . . . would be a play and not a little pantomime' (*RP*, 126).

There is also an ironic 'doubleness' in some of the humour, and this has a pointedly equalizing effect. When Jackson pronounces 'mariner' (from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner') as 'marina' (*RP*, 164), we are not sure whether the mispronunciation is his knowing mischievousness or the result of ignorance. In any event, we may chuckle self-congratulatingly at an example of stock West Indian ineptitude with English, while also chuckling with glee at the put-down of a literary sacred cow. There is a hilarious send-up of the idea of language being 'given' to the black savage by the civilized white man. Jackson-Crusoe decides to test Trewe's play design. He insists, tongue in cheek, on taking his role seriously, and sets out to teach Trewe-Friday language. He improvises an African-sounding nonsense language (and improvisation is a principle laid down by Trewe for the play making). What comes out is the sort of thing that West Indians were brought up to think representative of African languages.

Patricia Ismond remarks that the episode 'aims obliquely at the extremist doctrines of black nationalism, taking it to its farcical limits'.⁹ This may be true, obliquely, but the joke cuts at least both ways: it also makes the point about the arbitrariness and conventionality of language, that words do not have any inherent pre-ordained meaning, but derive meaning from the conventions that govern their use, and that the power of a language is a function of the material power of the people who use it.

This episode marks one of the many stations of the metaphorical cross of postcolonial theory that the play humorously traverses. Part of the reader-audience's pleasure is in spotting them. For instance, in Trewe's playscript *Crusoe* manifests the classic ambivalence of the white colonizer towards the discovered place, the shipwreck island. It is both paradise and 'complete desolation' (*RP*, 142). When Jackson professes to be scandalized by Trewe's undressing before him, the latter responds, 'There's nobody here' (*RP*, 103). In addition to all the connotations of the reference to the Cyclops episode in *The Odyssey* and (in anticipation) Walcott's *The Odyssey: a Stage Version*, there is a replay of the idea of the invisibility of the black man. There is the sarcastic double-voicing when Jackson cautions Trewe, 'You mustn't rush things, people have to slide into Independence' (*RP*, 152). And when Trewe falls into the role of colonizer with such egregious insouciance in his 'You people create nothing' (*RP*, 156), all of Caribbean postcolonial angst is reduced to a resounding cliché.

Nothing of the foregoing is to suggest that Walcott either advocates or envisages a simple reversal of the *Crusoe*–Friday relationship in actual life. Such a reversal would not really change anything; both parties would remain locked in the victor–victim stasis. As with *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, what is important in the first place is a change in consciousness. At the end of the play, Trewe is still the owner of the hotel and Jackson, from all indications, will still be in his employ. However, because of the inward purgation which they have gone through together, there will be a new understanding and mutual respect between them. As Jackson sings in his closing calypso, with a twinkle in the eye, 'It go be man to man' (*RP*, 170). This represents a salutary revision of Trewe's earlier, patronizing instruction that the two play '[m]an to man' (*RP*, 142). *Pantomime*, a two-hander, plays pointedly with the notion of the two characters playing man to man. The final position also redeems the view expressed earlier in Jackson's cynical observation that the dialogue taking place between the two is really 'one of them "playing man-to-man talks"' (*RP*, 139), which is only a disguise under which the received imbalance of power may be maintained.

There is also a development in Walcott's depiction of the colonial relationship, in that, whereas *Dream* had dramatized the psychic healing needful to the colonized, *Pantomime* shifts the focus to the

psychic healing that the colonizer also needs. What is more, it is Friday who is the agent of Crusoe's healing. It is Jackson who prompts Trewe to find and be 'what a man is'.

'THE LAST CARNIVAL'

In *The Last Carnival*, first produced in 1982, Walcott continues to explore his response to the 1970 uprising in Trinidad and Tobago. Whereas in *Remembrance* the event is contemplated by Jordan and his family after a lapse of seven years, *The Last Carnival* begins some twenty years before the uprising and ends at the time of the uprising. Through this time span, the play suggests the change from pre- to post-Independence and factors which were conducive to the attempt at revolution.

The Last Carnival opens in 1948, with the arrival of a young, educated working-class Englishwoman, Agatha Willett, to be governess to the children of widower Victor de la Fontaine, a French creole painter. This event begins a motif of arrival and departure, motion and stasis, that will be of thematic significance. It will emerge that, despite all the comings and goings, all the flurries of movement, and in particular the revolutionary movement culminating in 1970, there is not likely to be any real change in the Trinidadian status quo. Agatha, bright and well intentioned, arrives with her postwar English liberal-socialist zeal to open up the Trinidadian grid of class, race and privilege. The play is the story of how she is gradually, inexorably co-opted by the status quo. The ironic motif of stasis in motion is visually represented throughout the play in Victor's obsession with the famous eighteenth-century French painting *Embarkation to Cythera* by Antoine Watteau. There is a double irony in the fact that it is Victor himself who voices the idea that Watteau 'painted / his whole culture as if it were a sunset, / because all embarkation is a fantasy . . . / . . . / it's like some paralyzed moment in a carnival' (*TP*, 17). Victor is knowingly in love with stasis, with the dream of a timeless land of artistic beauty impermeable to the changes taking place in the actual world about him.

Victor is the play's most extreme individual embodiment of the effete French creole aristocracy which is the play's main focus. His suicide is as much a statement about his caste as about himself.

The French creoles provide another opportunity for Walcott to express his critical compassion for unpopular sections of the social fabric, the sunset sadness which he feels for the passing of empire, for the Captain Franklins of the islands and the 'deciduous beauty [that] prospered [in the Great House] and [was] gone' (*CP*, 19). Walcott nicely individualizes the members of the dysfunctional de la Fontaine family. In contrast to the almost self-parodying Victor is his brother Oswald, the down-to-earth, business-oriented one, the planter who keeps the estate going. He sees through the sham of the family's cultural inbreeding, but has long decided to let things be, hiding under a carapace of bluff vernacular cynicism laced with gin. Victor's children, Clodia and Tony (from 'Antoine' as in 'Watteau'), are psychologically bruised products of their upbringing, caught between their hothouse circle and the life of the servants and the streets. Clodia is tough-minded, capable of fight, free-loving if not promiscuous, but she too has to resort to defensive sarcasm and to eventual flight from Trinidad, finding herself defeated by the emotional complexities in which she has become entangled.

Act I ends with a brief, transitional scene at a village cricket match on a field near to the de la Fontaines' Santa Rosa estate, on Trinidad's Independence Day in 1962. It is a scene plangent with the dying fall of empires and the old social order. Act II opens in the de la Fontaines' 'castle' in February 1970. It is Carnival time, but, ironically, the revolution is also afoot. The twilight of the French creoles is played off against the short-lived but angry flame of the revolutionary attempt. The relationship between the two provides some insight into the general social malaise. On the one hand, there is the implication that the long-entrenched privilege and attitude of the French creole minority help to explain the festering discontent of the under-class. On the other hand, the uprising of the blacks is a further signal of the disintegration of French creole power.

However, by representing this rather effete French creole minority as the main, the most realized agent of oppression against the underprivileged, the play to that extent emasculates the revolutionaries. The central conflict of forces becomes less complex, less 'real' than it must have been in actuality. The revolutionaries are hardly a force to be reckoned with. Not surprisingly, some reviewers had found in *In A Fine Castle*, the unpublished early version of *Last*

Carnival, 'a certain glib attitude to Black Power in the Caribbean',¹⁰ and that whereas the 'arrogant French Creoles are deeply probed', 'the black revolutionaries are too easily derided'.¹¹ This weakness remains substantial in *The Last Carnival*.

The only revolutionary whom we actually see and hear is Sydney, a pathetic victim of the revolution he is deceived into thinking that he is making. Sydney grew up among the servants on the de la Fontaine estate, where he developed a sense of inferiority and an understandable desire for revenge. He appears as misguided, duped, used, seduced (and literally so by the free-wheeling Clodia), and made into a naive, doomed guerrilla by his betters and elders – whether the de la Fontaines, or the likes of their 'Uncle Tom' servant George, or Agatha Willett, with her starry-eyed zeal for re-engineering the social construct and putting ideas into the heads of the under-class, or the unheard leaders and ideologues of the uprising. Sydney is no doubt true to life, but there must have been more convincing, articulate, closely reasoning voices for the revolutionary cause, spokespersons less easily dismissible as psycho-pathological case studies.

The portrayal of Sydney is consistent with that of the February Revolution as seen by Albert Jordan in *Remembrance*, or as imaged, though with some trace of a futile, idealistic heroism, in Shabine's cameo account, in 'The Schooner *Flight*,' of the young men whom he had seen 'marching into the mountains' one Sunday at noon. The portrayal is also generally consistent with the depiction of Aaron's attempt at resistance in *O Babylon!* It is as if, by contrast, the distance of fable in *Ti-Jean* and the internal, psychological deeps of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* allowed Walcott, in those plays, to imagine folk revolutionaries capable of being exemplars for their people. Curiously, in his response to actual contemporary attempts at popular resistance, Walcott seems to overlook any such capacity in the people.

In the split society of *The Last Carnival*, there is no centre, least of all one that might, given the right circumstances, 'hold'. The character who might have represented such a point of balance, the black journalist Brown (and the name obviously signifies) enjoys a cynical, world-weary, self-indulgent detachment from all causes. He sees people as inextricably locked into their discrete boxes of class, colour and power or the lack of it. His portrait gains no depth from the ease with which he is sexually attracted to Clodia, who would, by

the rules of class, be otherwise inaccessible to him. Their brief dalliance, at one and the same time arbitrary and predictable, adds to the soap-opera quality of the various romantic-sexual couplings in the play.

Everything is subsumed in the motif of role-playing and the idea of role-playing as play-acting, with the Naipaulian implication that West Indian society moves inevitably 'from play-acting to disorder',¹² or between the two. It is no accident, then, that the play's climax and denouement take place against the backdrop of Carnival. Every one, every group may be seen as 'playing mas' – whether the Carnival revellers themselves, apparently not concerned with the play's serious action, or the de la Fontaine household, under the shadow of Victor's theatricality, playing at a Watteau-like *bal masqué*, or the revolutionaries playing at revolution. The play offers no serious counter to Clodia's satirical dismissal of them: 'Oh, God! Black Power, pang-alangalang! Che Guevara! Pang-alangalang / Go home, honky, pang-alangalang!' (*TP*, 54).

The brief closing scene, in which Brown forces his way on to the *Antilles* (another ironically significant name) to see Clodia, who is about to sail from Trinidad, is a bleak, deflating revision of Watteau's *Embarkation [from] Cythera*, and a defeatist reversal of the opening scene, which Clodia now recalls in detail, of Agatha's arrival at what she was quick to construct, with Victor's help, as her Paradise island. Victor's observation that 'all embarkation is a fantasy' now seems biting true: Clodia may go away from Trinidad, but she will never really leave it behind. The high seriousness of George's Old Testament quotation, which immediately precedes the final scene, and which is really the play's 'last word', is worthy of tragedy; here, though, it sounds not the note of tragic joy but only a rueful pathos: 'So I returned and considered all the oppressions / that are done under the sun. . . / wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, / More than the living which are yet alive' (Ecclesiastes 4: 1–2).

'BEEF, NO CHICKEN'

In *Beef, No Chicken* (first produced in 1981), as its facetious-sounding title hints, Walcott dons the mask of light comedy and farce for a satirical look at other aspects of post-Independence

Trinidad. There are some outlandish situations and characters, and a dash of egregiously corny verbal wit. A major butt of criticism is the popular euphoria over a progress and modernization which mean concrete, 'McDonaldization' and the destruction of the natural environment and traditional folkways. Another butt of criticism is the venality which is a dynamic of this euphoria, together with the political corruption which supports and thrives on it. Even where persons may explicitly bemoan the 'development', many are only too ready to 'cash in' on it, to make a deal, to 'get a likkle piece of the action' (*TP*, 110). The euphoria is voiced with rhetorical flourish by the mayor of the borough council, a former peasant only too anxious to distance himself from the land: 'I ain't want to get up in the morning and see a set of cane, and two, three cow parked in the pasture. I know all that, I grow up with that. Nah! I want to get up and hear car horn, not cow horn, I want to hear traffic jam blowing, not sheep' (*TP*, 167). Criticism of this kind of development in the Caribbean runs through Walcott's work, in his impression, for example, of the 'cement phoenix' that rose from the ashes of the 1948 fire (*Another Life*, chapter 16), and his description of Frederiksted as 'the first freeport to die for tourism' (*SG*, 10).¹³

The action of *Beef, No Chicken* centres on the fact that a modern highway is being built through the small town of Couva (as in 'The Saddhu of Couva', *The Star-Apple Kingdom*). There has been deadlock in the borough council on the necessary vote to approve the highway passing through the town. Otto Hogan, owner-manager of Otto's Auto Repair and Authentic Roti (shop), a small-time enterprise, has the casting vote and votes against the project. This does not prevent the project from going ahead, and those who are in favour of it begin to harrass him into giving in, piling excavated earth and digging a trench in front of his business place. In hilariously bizarre retaliation, Otto dresses up as a woman and goes out to the construction site early in the morning, playing the role of a ghost, in an attempt to frighten the men away from the site. Here he is exploiting folk superstition. The would-be ghost becomes the talk of the town, and is described in the local newspaper as 'a mysterious figure, a woman apparently, said to be the spirit of the silk cotton tree' (*TP*, 118). In African-Caribbean folklore, silk cotton trees are associated with ghosts, and slaves were said to have been hanged from them.

The venal predisposition of some of the town's citizens is represented most vividly in Mongroo, one of the more influential members of the borough council. Not surprisingly, Mongroo's construction company gets a contract for a job on the highway project. He considers that everyone can be bought and that that is a perfectly fair policy by which to better oneself. He puts his case to Otto:

Look, I tired eating chicken. Let we eat steak. How you so surprised? All over the world this happening, man. Bribery is the first stage of economic development. Oh, Jesus, is no big thing that my company deliberately order the wrong size pipe to drag out the contract, and that in the process some bread change hands, the right hand supposed to feed the left. . . (TP, 167)

Sub-plots diffuse the focus on the main plot but contribute to another apparent purpose of the play, namely to present a cross-section of small-town life and to increase the variety of voices and shenanigans. So there is the story of Euphony, Otto's sister, who is waiting for the return of her boyfriend, ex-merchant seaman Aldwyn Davies, who went off to work in the coal mines of Wales, where he became the prize-fighter Cardiff Joe. The presence of this character, recalling his time of separation from Trinidad, allows Walcott to introduce a voice of nostalgia for the old ways and environment. Exotic though he may be, Cardiff Joe is a voice of good sense. For instance, it is he who says, 'The governments promise progress, but do they ever ask the people what kind of progress they want? If they want the kind that destroys the people, be it a new highway or a new bomb?' (TP, 202).

While Euphony waits for her hero's return, she is courted by a man-about-town. This allows Walcott to introduce another outlandish character, the pseudo-intellectual and officious schoolmaster, Eldridge Franco. Puffed up with his little learning, his allusions to Homer, Shakespeare, Goldsmith and Jane Austen, one may say of him, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Albert Jordan (of *Remembrance*).' His presence allows Walcott to add to the comic business, as when, because of his desire for Euphony, Franco agrees reluctantly to suffer the indignity of playing the female ghost, despite his fear of the dobermanns that guard the construction site.

Part of the comedy of the scene is in Franco's parodic attempt to draw parallels between it and the ghost scene in *Hamlet*. His laughable pretension to high literary style contrasts with the calypso improvisations of Limer, 'an idler', as his name implies.

Here again different styles of play are being played off against each other, and Walcott's interest in the West Indian penchant for performance and self-dramatizing theatricality is being extended. In the case of this play, television becomes the appropriate media dimension of modernization and progress. In the words of the Deacon, identified in the list of characters as 'a vagabond preacher':

From reality to shadow, from the substantial
to the insubstantial, we believe in our images
instead of ourselves until everything that lives
ain't holy no longer but fully photographed,
and the rest of our creed is: 'I saw it on TV.' (*TP*, 199)

Significantly, the Deacon's own theatricality in these lines is comically reinforced by the fact that they are being spoken as he presides at the marriage ceremony of Euphony and Cardiff Joe, and this at Otto's shop counter (in lieu of an altar). Limer and Drusilla, Otto's niece, have long since become television personalities on the flimsiest of qualifications, and have thereby brought some glamour and notoriety to Couva. In the end, everyone is 'on TV', so to speak. For the final scene, the highway having been just opened, Euphony has said a Chekhovian farewell to the 'sweet little parlour' (*TP*, 205), and '[o]ne corner of the parlour becomes a small TV set, with a news desk and a map showing Trinidad as the centre of the world' (*TP*, 206).

'A BRANCH OF THE BLUE NILE'

Role-playing (the fascination of it, the temptation, the dangers, the necessity, the significance) and the problematics of the relationship between role-playing and reality are central concerns of *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, first produced in 1983. These themes are put into sharpened relief by being addressed through characters who, by vocation and avocation, are in the business of role-playing, namely theatre actors. In this context, the theme of the relationship between theatre and reality is a variation on the theme of the relationship

between art and life which runs through Walcott's work. The particular context also allows Walcott to dramatize the difficulty of developing a sustainable, fully realized West Indian theatre such as he had always envisaged. In this regard, one set of tensions notably addressed in *Branch* is that between local, African-based performance style and classical, European style, between 'classical and creole', between 'high' language and dialect or creole, such as had been played out comically in *Pantomime*. These tensions, part of the postcolonial angst, the anxiety of the so-called margin in relation to the centre, may, as *Branch* shows, and depending on circumstances and strength of character, prove to be either destructive or creative.

The story tells of an amateur theatre group in Port of Spain and of the circumstances, both interpersonal and external, which lead to its break-up. Walcott had not long before fallen out with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop which he had founded and directed;¹⁴ but while *Branch* may to some extent be generated out of that episode and represents a way of coming to terms with it, the play's integrity and viability break free from the autobiographical material which went into its making.

All of the main characters are in their different ways in love with the theatre. There is the director of the company, Harvey St Juste, a white Trinidadian with experience in the London theatre. He has returned home with a sense of mission, to develop a professional company in Trinidad with the highest standards of excellence. Another returnee is Gavin, who has been disillusioned by his experience of trying to achieve success as a black West Indian actor on the New York stage. But Gavin is a survivor who will not leave the theatre even if it is, as Marylin says, 'a whorehouse.' She identifies with him as 'the ones with guts, / the ones who don't quit' (*TP*, 296). So Gavin's survival strategy is to develop a self-dramatizing life-role of sharp-tongued, brutally honest, don't-give-a-damn realism. Marylin is a rather superficial person, more taken by the glamour of the theatre than anything else, changing her family name (and her life-role) from Lewis to LaLune. The theatre does give her a sense of self-esteem. She becomes deeply involved with the group despite animosities and quarrels, and she is shattered when the company falls apart and Harvey decides to return to London.

Then there are Chris and Sheila, whose affair accounts for a significant part of the dynamics of the group. Chris respects Sheila, but he has no intention of leaving his wife. He is also a playwright, and during the play he is writing a Trinidadian play for the company while they are rehearsing for a production of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The analogy of the Antony–Cleopatra with the Chris–Sheila relationships enriches the dramatic potential of *Branch*. After Chris breaks with the company and goes off to Barbados, where his English wife will find a more congenial social ambience, he begins to write a play which is to tell the story of the company ('Everything we tried to do' (*TP*, 306)), a play which is really *A Branch of the Blue Nile*. This strategy on Walcott's part adds a meta-dimension, as it were, to his play's concern with the idea of (role) playing.

Sheila Harris is the main character. It is in *her* personal crisis and development that the issues of the play are mostly centred. She is also the most gifted actor of the group. Her feelings for Chris and her awareness of the imminence of their separation are key factors in her impressive, even if momentary, 'possession' of the persona of Cleopatra. At the same time, those feelings contribute to the confusion and frustration that drive her to drop out of the Cleopatra role and out of the company and turn to religion. Alive to the awesome challenge of the actor's commitment, she also seems driven to give up the theatre out of fear that she is not equal to its demands, to repeating the high standard that she herself had achieved briefly. This latter fear represents the actors' general unease in undertaking Shakespeare and the classics and the postcolonial questioning of their relevance.

The anti-classics case is put most vehemently and colourfully by Chris, an ideological convert who makes a show of rejecting the 'sound colonial education' that had given him success in life. He walks out on the company after a tirade against Harvey, whom he sarcastically accuses of imposing on the company 'high-class work [that] go falsify ambition' (*TP*, 247). He brandishes the sometimes fashionable charge of the irrelevance of European classics to the Third World: 'I ain't care who the arse it is, Shakespeare, Racine, Chekhov, nutten in there had to do with my life, or the life of all them black people out in the hot sun' (*TP*, 246). In his outburst,

Chris makes the point of flaunting the broadest Trinidadian speech: 'cause I'se a Trinidadian, and that's my language' (*TP*, 246).

One can imagine Chris' outburst eliciting spirited applause from sections of a West Indian audience, those who would soonest wish to believe that Chris' argument is what Walcott would like them to identify with. But Chris 'doth protest too much', as Hamlet said of Polonius, and his theatrical assertion of identity only betrays his crisis of identity. He sounds too much like someone playing a part for an audience of believers, a well-off middle-class success story making a big show of being one of the people. Listening to him carry on, one recalls Walcott's criticism, in 'What the Twilight Says,' of avant-garde intellectuals who 'apotheosiz[ed] the folk form' (*WTS*, 31). In the fulness of Walcott's view, there is not so neat and absolute a polarity between classical and creole, between home and abroad as Chris' argument suggests; it is not a simple matter of accepting or rejecting one or the other.

The nuances of the opposition, and the possibility of a creative interaction between the two styles and cultures, the two languages, are played out in *Branch*. For instance, in the opening scene, the attempt to rehearse a scene from *Antony and Cleopatra* is repeatedly undermined by creole interventions from the actors, humorously subverting the Shakespeare text. At the same time, these interventions allay, mask and betray the actors' insecurity with the Shakespeare. Here creole functions only as comic put-down of Shakespeare's elevated speech. Later, in a rehearsal of Cleopatra's death scene, there is a clever alternating of styles, when Harvey makes the Clown improvise in Trinidadian in his conversation with Cleopatra. To this limited extent there is a Caribbean appropriation of Shakespeare, even while the feeling of the original is maintained, and even though a purist, pedantic critic scoffs at the experiment.

Then, near the end of *Branch*, Chris returns from Barbados with the script which is his 'act of contrition' (*TP*, 291) for his earlier tantrum and his walking out on the group. This is obviously a truly West Indian play, but one, as its title suggests and as Walcott's play manifests, that will acknowledge and celebrate a link with Shakespeare and 'elsewhere'; and in which the vivacity of creole will touch the note of high seriousness, as is evident in the speech that Chris reads for Sheila from his script. For one thing, the passage

establishes, through the image of the scarlet ibis, the link between Trinidad and Shakespeare's Egypt.

This speech is an answer to Sheila's earlier disillusioned and self-doubting observation that 'the Caroni isn't a branch of the river Nile, / and Trinidad isn't Egypt, except at Carnival, / so the world sniggers when I speak her lines' (*TP*, 285). But Sheila did, however momentarily, possess the persona of Cleopatra. Her colleagues had acknowledged the transcendent authority of her performance, and she was able to articulate her lived experience that, through the power of imagination, Trinidad *could* become Egypt: 'I heard my blood / whispering like the Nile' (*TP*, 285).

Sheila is one of Walcott's strongest achievements in female character drawing. She is a person, not an icon, a richly faceted character, gifted, passionate, loving, frightened, suffering, confused, forthright, 'bitching,' assertive, strong. In her, too, Walcott focusses the idea of theatre as a kind of religion, demanding faith and commitment. This idea is foregrounded in the fact that, when Sheila leaves the theatre, she gives herself to the church, with the same intensity that she had brought to her acting. As she explains, 'I've simply changed religions' (*TP*, 286). The permutations of the church-theatre relationship are explicit in statements made by some of the characters, notably Sheila herself. And the force of the idea is deepened by the counter-proposition, from Marylin (speaking like Gavin): 'The theatre ain't no religion, it's a whorehouse' (*TP*, 286).

The theatre-art-religion-love-madness nexus (all being versions of spiritual possession), is strikingly embodied in the figure of Phil, formerly of Phil and the Rockets, a casualty of the stage, so to speak, who has been driven to take on the life-role of inspired madman. He seizes every opportunity to walk in on the actors at rehearsal and, like an itinerant prophet, to inveigh against society. He is, even more than Chris knows, Walcott's 'Mad Tom [*King Lear*] out in the rain' (*TP*, 247), speaking more truly than the certifiably sane. Here again Walcott makes didacticism artistically persuasive by distancing it through the persona of the madman (or innocent, or fool). It is Phil who says, 'I does summon brimstone and ashes on everybody head. On a government that don't give a fart – excuse me, miss – for its artists, on a people you have to remind to find some pride' (*TP*, 300). *Branch* is Walcott's dramatic tribute to the theatre, and it is

Phil who speaks the final, blessed and blessing word, 'Oh, God, a actor is a holy thing. A sacred thing' (*TP*, 312). Derelict and dispossessed though he is, it is he who speaks the word of renewal to Sheila at the end: 'Get up. Do what you have to do. . . Please. Continue. Do your work' (*TP*, 312).

'THE GHOST DANCE'

In his foreword to *Walker* and *The Ghost Dance*, Walcott writes that 'both [plays] are completely American in history and setting, and both deal with disenfranchisement and deprivation' (*WGD*, vii). More particularly, they deal with events in the early history of the disenfranchisement and deprivation of the two most disadvantaged racial minorities of the United States, the native Indians and the African Americans. His long-standing empathy with both groups is a natural function of his world-view as a Caribbean person as it is of his transcultural breadth of imagination.

Although the story of the Native Americans had so far accounted for only a small part of Walcott's subject-matter, his interest in it had been strong and consistent. It is there as we move through his poetry, from 'Lines in New England' (*The Castaway*), through 'Over Colorado' (*Sea Grapes*) to 'Forest of Europe' (*The Star-Apple Kingdom*). For instance, the infamous Trail of Tears, poignantly recalled in 'Forest of Europe', speaks to all forced dislocation of peoples by exploiting conquerors, a phenomenon of which the Middle Passage is the most immediate prototype for Caribbean man. The gulf of race between Native and White American is a variant of the gulf in the title poem of *The Gulf*.

The Ghost Dance commemorates a decisively tragic chapter in the history of the Native American, when Sitting Bull, the Sioux chief, sought to marshal the tribes against the final campaign of the United States government to defeat them and take their land. Sitting Bull's ambition was doomed. He was assassinated by members of his own tribe acting as government police. Soon after that his followers were massacred at Wounded Knee creek, and the tribes dispersed on to reservations. Sitting Bull had sought to rally the tribes around the messianic Ghost Dance movement. This religious movement rested on a belief that the white man would disappear after a cataclysm of

nature, and that the dead Native American ancestors would return to restore the dying traditions. The centrepiece of the movement was the ritual of the Ghost Dance itself. The adherents also believed in the magical power of a bullet-proof 'ghost shirt'.

These events are only indirectly the subject-matter of the play's action. The protagonist is a white woman, Catherine Weldon, an historical figure, and the action concerns her attempt to help Sitting Bull and the Native Americans at a time when Sitting Bull had come to reject her friendship. The final rift came when Catherine sought to dissuade Sitting Bull from fomenting the Ghost Dance movement towards confrontation with the US army. She thought, correctly, that the army, alarmed by the apparent hysteria of the Dance, and the amalgamation of the tribes, would only hasten to put them down once and for all.

The play's action has substantially to do with Catherine's dealings with the army and with Major James McLaughlin, the government agent for Native American affairs, in her attempt to head off the destruction of the Native Americans. The plot turns on the romantic entanglement that Walcott imagines between Catherine and McLaughlin. The relationship develops out of the sexual attraction McLaughlin feels towards her and her wish to help Sitting Bull by finding out and informing him of the manoeuvres that the government forces are planning against him. Catherine and McLaughlin fall in love, a development which painfully complicates their situations and projects. McLaughlin is stripped of his rank and imprisoned along with his wife when he is 'found guilty of consorting with the enemy' (*WGD*, 232). However, his care for his reputation and his opinion of the Native American are such that he manages to get the Native American police who had been under his command to kill Sitting Bull, without the help of the army. He justifies his action to Catherine by saying that 'It will stop this madness of the Ghost Dance' (*WGD*, 236). So he becomes a hero and his rank is restored.

Walcott establishes Catherine's moral stature and courage by contrast with the range of conduct and attitudes shown towards the Native American by the white men with whom she has to deal. There is, for instance, the coarse Sergeant Donnelly, for whom Native Americans and women are objects only of sport or abuse. In contrast is the learned Dr Beddoes, army surgeon, arguing

fluently, out of a scientific rationalism, the inferiority of the Native American. McLaughlin is married to an Indian, and Lieutenant Brandon is engaged to a Native American girl, the demure and virtuous Lucy, who, like her father, a lay preacher, is a convert to Christianity. But neither Brandon nor McLaughlin is capable of any real sympathy for the Native American cause; nor can many of the whites truly accept the conversion of the Native Americans.

Walcott's portrait of Catherine Weldon is a memorable achievement. She is a flesh-and-blood woman of character, courage and feeling, who is not romanticized in her capacity to be an agent of desirable change, however much her immediate effort may have failed. Like Luther Franklin, she embodies Walcott's belief in the efficacy of the cross-cultural imagination. In his willingness and ability to imagine himself into the mind of figures from the party of the historically privileged and exploitative, he makes a notable contribution to the examination of the complicated web of relationships and responsibilities that is the colonial experience.

Catherine is entirely compelling when she says to the General, who may think that she has given up her struggle on behalf of the Native American:

... sometimes I feel exactly like them,
going through my ordinary chores:
that nothing can hurt me, that bullets
could go through my body, that
having accepted that secret of happiness
that every tribe will share, sir,
I have never felt more alive. (*WGD*, 223)

Catherine's brave empathy with the Native Americans was also to feature in *Omeros*, which was published the year after the premiere of *The Ghost Dance*.¹⁵

The verse that predominates in the play is of an easy but dignified colloquial tenor, appropriate to the serious/tragic mode of the play, eschewing grandiloquence. It ranges from free verse through a varying three and four beat line, as in the speech just quoted, to a subtly flexuous blank verse in which the iambic beat is continually muted, as for instance, in Catherine's speech which closes the play as it raises up again the spirits of the warriors and the tribes:

I believe they are always there, always approaching,
 like thunder without sound, on hooves of smoke,
 those whom the land that gave them life belonged to –
 Sitting Bull, Kicking Bear, and the leaves of the tribes,
 the Blackfoot, the Sioux, the Ogalalas, the Cheyenne. (*WGD*, 246)

That speech and the final fade-out into which it slides are strong in cinematic potential, as are other moments and features of the play, including the Ghost Dance, an increasingly prominent motif throughout. Many of the changes of setting would be enhanced by film technique. The first two scenes, and the beginning of the third are entirely wordless, cutting back and forth from the camera's point of view as Kicking Bear, observed by Catherine, cautiously comes into the parlour and kitchen of the Parkin ranch, sent by Sitting Bull to return gifts which she had given him.

'WALKER'

Walker, first produced as an opera in 1993, and rewritten as a play with music for production in 2001, imagines the last few, fateful hours in the life of David Walker, an early nineteenth-century African American revolutionary. Born free, of a free mother and a slave father, he advocated violent uprising by the slaves against their masters as the necessary means of their attaining freedom.

The play captures the high intensity of the confrontation between Walker's unyielding conviction and the force of white oppression closing in inexorably on him. This fate insinuates itself into the action in the image of the snow engulfing everything, and in the spectral Figure, not so much a character as an idea and a force, a Fate that hovers in the shadows outside Walker's house, vowing not to break its fast until he is destroyed. The pain and cruelty of the story are made all the sharper by being brought to their climax at Thanksgiving. The characters, strongly drawn and sharply differentiated, move around each other in a suspenseful arabesque of point and counterpoint. Walker's iron will, bent to a path of doom, is movingly enacted in his willingness to put his cause above his devoted wife and his equally bewildered friend and mentor, the white abolitionist William Garrison. His harsh words to them may be more a way of steeling his heart against the pull

of personal affection than a sign of a genuine turning away from them.

Even in the absence of a musical score, the songs suggest an effective use of African American folk music – gospel hymn, spiritual, minstrel shuffle, blues. Many of the speeches are in a verse form and style that suggest song lyrics and enhance the idea of the play as a threnody, as a poem. The use of a Chorus of singers underscores the communal significance of Walker's project. Their refrain endorses this idea, the tradition of African American struggle, with its invocation of the spirit of another early black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, and its knowingly anachronistic invocation of the spirits of the twentieth-century African American artists Romare Bearden, Horace Pippin and Jacob Lawrence, famous for chronicling that struggle and journey in their art. It is as if the Chorus represents the contemporary generation; although the introduction of Bearden *et al.* may seem a bit contrived.

The intellectual and moral issue which the play raises is the age-old one of the justification for the use of planned, bloody violence in pursuit of a just revolutionary cause. In light of Walcott's critical portrayal of the apparent blood-lust of a Dessalines, or of the Makak who, in his African fantasy of power and splendour, calls for 'War. Fire, fire and destruction' (*DMM*, 295) of all white people, and in light of Walcott's view of black revolutionaries of his time and place as giving in to a misguided and racist rage for revenge, it is particularly interesting to note the tact with which Walker is presented. There is no theoretical critique of his position. If we recoil from his hardness, it is by virtue of our sympathy for Eliza and Garrison when he turns on them, and to the extent that they articulate their positions in a way that commands respect and may even be persuasive. The situations are movingly human.

There is no hint of self-aggrandizement in Walker's purpose, no anticipatory gloating. He is ennobled by his lack of concern for his personal safety and well-being. By introducing the character of Catherine, a destitute Irish girl whom the Walkers had taken 'from the workhouse / to clean and sometimes cook for them' (*WGD*, 66), and whom they treat with kindness and respect, Walcott shows us the gentle, endearing side of Walker's humanity. It would seem, though, that the point is being stretched when Walcott has Walker

say to Catherine that her innocence could almost make him waver in his resolve (*WGD*, 98). Also humanizing him, and balancing his iron will, is the gullibility, even innocence, with which he allows himself to be outdone by the mercenary 'con man', Barbados. This gullibility may be read as a manifestation of Walker's tragic flaw, so to speak, his extreme intensity of will. Barbados' self-serving venality, his willingness to sell his own people, makes the point that Walcott does not see the world in simplistic black-and-white. Even more to the point is the fact that Walker's treatment of Catherine shows that his struggle is not racist. Here again Walcott is careful to set the black struggle for freedom in the context of the experience of other oppressed peoples of whatever colour: the Jews, the native peoples of the United States, the Irish.

After all Walcott's other protagonists, Walker is Walcott's version of the tragic hero. His body is carried off stage by a 'warrior cortège' as Eliza sings, 'Let warriors lift him for his battle / Is over' (*WGD*, 114). We recall the young Walcott's desire for an indigenous warrior figure to be an icon of West Indian drama.

'Here' and 'Elsewhere', 'Word' and 'World':
 The Fortunate Traveller, Midsummer,
 The Arkansas Testament

All but two of the ten poems in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* are set in the Caribbean, and in one of the two that are not, setting is insignificant. By contrast, although the vast majority of the poems in *The Fortunate Traveller* are also set in the Caribbean, the book makes a point of calling attention to the fact that some of the poems engage with places abroad, more particularly with Europe and the USA. The poems are grouped in three sections, 'North', 'South' and 'North'. This structure points up the notion that it is in the relationship between them, the relationship of difference in the first place, that each of the two poles has meaning. The topical North–South divide, at levels including but going beyond the strictly political, becomes a purposive concern in Walcott's poetry, one that involves the negotiating of identity.

The shuttling between South and North also occurs in *Midsummer*, but less systematically and 'announcedly' than in *The Fortunate Traveller*. The process mutates in *The Arkansas Testament* into the arrangement of the poems into two groups captioned 'Here' and 'Elsewhere', the former corresponding to 'South' and the latter to 'North'. However, the polarities continually deconstruct themselves. For instance, at a relatively superficial level, the grouping of poems under 'North' and 'South' is not so neat and definitive as ostensibly appears. The self-questioning movement between North and South is also a feature of the long narrative poems *Omeros* and *Tiepolo's Hound*, but it is convenient to deal with the topos here, and to highlight other considerations in dealing with the narratives.

The three new collections of the 1980s also show Walcott's increased concern with the relationship between 'word' and 'world', literature (or art) and life (or nature), as well as the relationship

between painting and poetry. The issue of the relationship between art and life, word and world, is not unconnected to that of the relationship between 'North' and 'South' or 'Here' and 'Elsewhere'. The word-world question had been strikingly apparent in *Another Life*, from the very first line: 'Verandahs, where the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master' (CP, 145). In *Another Life* this way of seeing had an obvious functional motive, in that it helped to focus the subject of the making of the poet. However, it also had a wider, philosophical significance, as when, for instance, to cite just one example, Walcott, noting the sense of ending already manifest in the beginning of his love for Anna, says, 'The hand she held already had betrayed / them by its longing for describing her' (CP, 236).

'THE FORTUNATE TRAVELLER'

The five poems in the first 'North' section of *The Fortunate Traveller* are very much about the United States, where Walcott had begun to live. These poems seek to define aspects of American character as they appeared to him from his Caribbean perspective, the point of view of what, in 'North and South', he self-derogatorily calls 'a colonial upstart at the end of an empire' (CP, 405). He seeks to 'enter' America imaginatively, to see under the picture-postcard views. The effort provokes mixed feelings in him. On the one hand, he can feel that, to his surprise, he is 'falling in love with America' (CP, 402) and imagining that the country is welcoming him: 'I will knock at the widowed door / of one of these villages / where she will admit me like a broad meadow, / like a blue space between mountains' (CP, 402). On the other hand, he exposes the bigotry and inhumanity that he finds in America, the 'splintered suns / of beads and mirrors – broken promises / that helped make the Republic what it is' (CP, 399–400). It seems appropriate that the book should open in 'Old New England', where the modern American 'project' began with the Pilgrim Fathers, and where Walcott was to live, in Boston, for many years. The oxymoron in 'old new' is rich with ironic significance. The poem draws a line of continuity between the slaughter of whales, the famous old New England industry, the decimation of the Native American, and the militaristic debacle of

the Vietnam war, setting these in ironic juxtaposition with the Christianity of the Pilgrim Fathers, on which the Republic was built, and which was used to justify the slaughters. Rippling through the three collections under discussion in this chapter is the disturbing motif of wars and rumours of wars, and tyrannies of one colour or another.

Walcott also makes the point that one has to feel the landscape of a place in its language. This is one aspect of the question of the relationship between word and world: 'I must put the cold small pebbles from the spring / under my tongue to learn her language, / to talk like birch or aspen confidently' (*CP*, 402), he writes in 'Upstate'. A similar idea informs 'Wales', in the second 'North' section, a poem very much about the consonance between language, geography and culture, as it will inform 'Streams', another poem about Wales in *The Arkansas Testament*. Related to this idea is the feature in some of the 'North' poems whereby the poet sees foreign places through their art, whether painting or literature.

'Piano Practice', a mood piece, is set in the Manhattan of the Metropolitan Museum of Art ('the museum') and the Metropolitan Opera ('the Met', also applied to the museum). 'Metropolitan', played upon in the poem, is a key word in the context of the North-South divide. It is 'metropolitan April', and through a drizzle the poet reads the scene in terms of 'hazy ... Impressionist clichés' (*CP*, 403), Paris of the *fin de siècle* and *la belle époque*. But it is also Thursday, and the rain calls to mind César Vallejo, the Peruvian poet and his death in Paris, far from home – 'Today is Thursday, Vallejo is dying' (*CP*, 404), 'César Vallejo, / and [his] raining Thursdays' (*CP* 265).¹ This allusion will deepen the resonance of the enigmatic penultimate line of *Midsummer*, 'Ah, Joseph, though no man ever dies in his own country' (*CP*, 510). The correspondence being made between Manhattan and Paris points to Walcott's own homesickness and sense of exile from his South. But the poem ends with another connection, this time a heartening one, which affirms the living presence of home in exile, and new artistic possibilities in the meeting of North and South. Near the Metropolitan, 'a steel tenor pan / dazzlingly practices something from old Vienna, / the scales skittering like minnows across the sea' (*CP*, 404). The piano the poet imagined hearing earlier in the poem

has been replaced and realized by the steel pan, Trinidad's gift to the world, which he actually hears.

Although the voice of 'North and South', the last and most considerable poem in the opening section, also speaks from 'Here, in Manhattan' (*CP*, 406), it ranges widely, both in geography and in time, engaging various aspects of the North-South issue including the artistic, as well as its roots in colonialism. While 'North' explicitly takes in Europe as well as the United States, 'North' and 'South' also refer to the historical divide within the US. The point of view of 'South' directs the poem, and the tone is bleak, angry, bitter, oppositional, even tending towards apocalyptic. As the destruction of Carthage was foretold in Virgil's *Aeneid*, so 'the side streets of Manhattan are sown with salt, / as those in the North all wait for that white glare / of the white rose of inferno, all the world's capitals' (*CP*, 405-6).

It is winter, when the afternoons become dark early in the North, and 'in this heart of darkness' – a postcolonial reversal in allusion to Conrad – home seems so far away that the poet finds it hard to believe that there the 'small-islander's simplicities' – to borrow a phrase from 'The Virgins' (*SG*, 10) – are alive and well. Still, everything is 'doubled', mediated, defined by the other, and the 'cacophonous seaports' of the islands are 'built round the single exclamation of one statute / of Victoria Regina' (*CP*, 406). Queen Victoria, Virgil and Carthage are icons of those classical and European traditions of art and culture which the poet both cherished and felt threatened by. In *Another Life* he had remembered his young self praying for the weight of that inheritance to be destroyed, 'for it to go / under the fisherman's heel, / for the clods to break / in epochs, crumbling Albion / in each unshelving scarp, / Sidon and Tyre' (*CP*, 208). Now he concedes that

... it may be a childish revenge
at the presumption of empires to hear the worm
gnawing their solemn columns into coral,
to snorkel over Atlantis, to see, through a mask,
Sidon up to its windows in sand, Tyre, Alexandria ... (*CP*, 405)

In lines that recall the dilemma expressed in 'Ruins of a Great House' and Shabine's 'But that's all them bastards have left us:

words' (*CP*, 350), he says, 'It's good that everything's gone, except their language, / which is everything' (*CP*, 405). Here he not only reaffirms his attachment to English, but expresses the awareness that language is empire. In any event, 'everything' is not gone, and the wound of history is still open, as long as he needs to say, with self-deflating cynicism, 'I accept my function / as a colonial upstart at the end of an empire' (*CP*, 405).

Weighed down by these considerations, bayed by critics, feeling that 'life has turned into exile' (*CP*, 407), the poet sighs, 'I am tired of words, / and literature is an old couch stuffed with fleas' (*CP*, 407), anticipating that mood in *Midsummer* in which he will cry, 'O Christ, my craft, and the long time it is taking!' (*M*, 23). But the poem will not be still; the engine of invention keeps sparking, and words ignite, in a manner that anticipates *Midsummer*. Merging with the persona of 'an old man / dressed like a tramp in an old Union greatcoat', 'in Virginia's woods' (*CP*, 409), perhaps a blues singer, and underscoring the racism in the North-South antagonism and making a correspondence between the smoke from the chimneys of Virginia and the smoke from the gas chambers of the Holocaust, Walcott ends with a searing affirmation of his claim as an artist, an affirmation effected through a reworking of the monkey metaphor:

... and when

I collect my change from a small-town pharmacy,
the cashier's fingertips still wince from my hand
as it would singe her – well, yes, *je suis un singe*,
I am one of that tribe of frenetic or melancholy
primates who made your music for many more moons
than all the silver quarters in the till. (*CP*, 409)

Roughly the first half of the poems in 'South' are variations on Walcott's cherished sea theme. 'A Sea Change', the opening poem of 'South', takes a sweeping, ominous view of the Caribbean islands. This 'sea change' is not 'into something rich and strange',² but into something strange and foreboding. To the persona, the rain coming in across the harbour, 'blotting out mountain and mountain range' (*FT*, 19) is a metaphor for 'a slow, somberer change' which he feels the region undergoing. The bleak prospect, which belies the old cliché of 'islands of the blest', is one of 'cheap package tours replaced / by

politics, rain, unrest' (*FT*, 19) and 'the dark gathering rage / of a bruised electorate' (*FT*, 20). The persona sees the change in a deep historical perspective, as linked ultimately to 'the weight of chains of centuries' (*FT*, 21), an allusion to slavery and the Black diaspora.

A few of the poems take up again Walcott's lifelong, contested involvement with the classics and mythology. For instance, in 'Map of the New World' – a sequence of three short poems – he finds it easy to imagine Homer, Greek mythology and medieval romance (the legend of Yseult) into the pristine coastal landscapes of the islands. 'Archipelagoes', the first poem in the sequence, in which, as a sail disappears on a rain-shrouded sea, he hears Homer striking the first chords of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, also sounds like Walcott 'tuning-up' for *Omeros*. In 'Europa', on a night of a 'fierce' full moon that arouses the imagination and the senses, the shapes of nature metamorphose and 'the black hump of a hill' becomes Zeus, in the form of a bull, 'treading' 'a tree [transformed into] a girl's body bent in foam' (*CP*, 418). The point is that 'once / you yield to human horniness, you see / through all that moonshine what they really were, / those gods as seed-bulls, gods as rutting swans – / an overheated farmhand's literature' (*CP*, 418). By this manoeuvre, Walcott naturalizes classical mythology, brings it down to Caribbean earth. This process affirms the power of Caribbean imagination to inhabit the mythopoeic dimension. So Walcott can see himself as inheriting the torch: 'The flame has left the charred wick of the cypress; / the light will catch these islands in their turn' (*FT*, 27).

In 'From This Far' (cf. 'A Far Cry From Africa'), in which he addresses the modern Greek poet George Seferis (1900–71), who translated the Odyssean myths into modern Greek idiom, Walcott laments that 'in the soil of our islands no gods are buried' and that alien gods 'were shipped to us . . . / dead on arrival' (*CP*, 414). This observation, granted that it relates specifically to European gods, may be as contentious as the closing lines of 'Laventille' ('customs and gods that are not born again' (*CP*, 88)), since it can be objected that African gods did in some form survive the Middle Passage. Again, Walcott's suggestion is that the power of poetic imagination can bring dead gods alive. Although he 'will never see Piraeus', he can 'boast' of the power of the eyes of imagination to bring him

'those flashes of inward life, / from the head's thunder-lit storms' (CP, 417). No doubt the head's thunder-lit storms can also flash before him the gods of Africa.

In 'Greece', the poet, mythologizing himself, figures himself climbing up to a rocky Caribbean sea-cliff with painful effort. Everything in the landscape transforms itself into some detail from Homer. His climb is all the more strenuous because he is carrying 'a body round [his] shoulders' (FT, 35). When he eventually reaches the top of the cliff, he hurls the dead weight of the body down on to the rocks below. The body is 'not really a body but a great book' (FT, 35), presumably the *Iliad*, and, by implication, the whole classical tradition. The act of disburdening himself of the body releases the poet, his head 'scoured of other people's monsters' (FT, 36), to connect with a positive, elemental emptiness or blank page, on which he can, as it were, invent language and name the world for himself afresh: 'Now, crouched before blank stone, / I wrote the sound for "sea", the sign for "sun"' (FT, 36). This does not mean that Walcott has rejected the classics. Rather, it represents one position in his creative dialogue with himself, as well as a coming to terms with the classics. *Omeros* is still to come.

'Hurucan' complements 'Greece' by celebrating the potential of an indigenous Caribbean mythology in the figure of the one Taino god who is still 'alive', in the hurricanes named after him. This is the same 'wind god, Hourucan [*sic*], [who] comb[ed the] hair' of the Caribs (CP, 214) as they raced to leap to their deaths at Sauteurs. Walcott affirms the indigenous Hurucan over against all other gods from 'elsewhere', whether 'the northern messenger' (Jupiter/Thor?) or the Yoruba Shango of 'the thunderous tambors' (CP, 424).

'Jean Rhys' and 'Early Pompeian' provide examples of Walcott's fondness for using allusion to the visual arts as a lens or frame through which to represent and read life. In 'Jean Rhys', the local cultural-historical context of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is imagined in terms of 'faint photographs' from the period, 'mottled with chemicals' (CP, 427) – the setting in which the young Rhys will discover Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and be inspired to tell, through revising it, the pain of Antoinette Cosway. 'Early Pompeian' skilfully manages the trauma of a stillbirth in its recording of the male narrator's feeling for the pain experienced by the mother, his woman. The unutterable

finds its objective correlative in likening the mother to a female figure in a Pompeian wall painting or mosaic, and then obliquely reconstructing the real-life experience as a kind of rite of passage, through the iconography of the art work.

'Store Bay' treats another aspect of the 'occupational hazards' of domestic-romantic relationships. Set at somnolent Store Bay in Tobago, the poem maps the heart-weariness and emptiness of the narrator trying to recuperate from a recent divorce, going to bed alone in his cheerless hotel room. '[T]he disfiguring exile of divorce' (*CP*, 441), with its mood of mingled failure, guilt and even self-disgust, also forms a basis of the much more considerable 'The Hotel Normandie Pool'. In this case, the condition is intensified by the fact that, as in 'Store Bay', the presence of the poet's two young daughters heightens the absence of their mother. This time, however, the particular depression of divorce is not so much the main focus of the poem as it is an integral part of a more general, more various and far-reaching sense of alienation in the midst of the loved and familiar. The idea of exile at home is figured poignantly in the fact that here, as in 'Store Bay', the poet is staying in a hotel, a transient so to speak, in his surrogate homeland. The hotel-room metaphor and point of view are not peculiar to poems about St Lucia and the Caribbean. It is also a crucial locus of speaking in poems about 'elsewhere', as for example in 'The Arkansas Testament'.

In 'The Hotel Normandie Pool' it is New Year's morning, and the poet awakens at the Normandie, 'a small, suburban . . . hotel' (*CP*, 445) in Port of Spain. The mood is immediately set by the images of cold and metallic hardness with which the poem opens: 'Around the cold pool in the metal light / of New Year's morning, I choose one of nine / cast-iron umbrellas set in iron tables / for work and coffee' (*CP*, 439). A white male tourist, in sandals and 'a robe of foam-frayed terry cloth' (*CP*, 441), becomes Ovid in exile at Tomis. He speaks to Walcott, describing his exile. The speaker's self-portrait addresses, by innuendo, Walcott's own situation and that of his island(s): 'Our emerald sands / are stained with sewage from each tin-shacked Rome; / corruption, censorship, and arrogance / make exile seem a happier thought than home' (*CP*, 442). Here Walcott contemplates an ironic double exile: his sense of unease and dislocation at home makes him think of physical exile as the lesser of

two evils. Through the Ovidian mask, Walcott can also affirm what he thinks he has achieved for his home place:

When I was first exiled,
I missed my language as your tongue needs salt,
...
No bench would tell my shadow 'Here's your place';
...
Till, on a tablet smooth as the pool's skin,
I made reflections that, in many ways,
were even stronger than their origin. (*CP*, 443)

It is through his writing that the writer finds or knows 'his place.' His 'reflections', whether in the sense of cogitations or representations, are in a way truer than their originals, the phenomena that inspire them. It is in the art that represents it that 'home' finds its strength and definition. Many years earlier, Walcott had written: 'The farther we move from home, the more strongly rooted the particular becomes, the more distinctive and describable those things that are true to their time and place ...'³

'Cantina Music' and 'The Liberator' describe fictional characters who are studies in the performance of identity. They play the roles of revolutionary and guerrilla in which they have cast themselves, creatures of 'the newest Latino mood' (*FT*, 61), to borrow a phrase from 'Port of Spain'. In the end, they are nothing more than their roles, all gesture, props and cinema-derived setting, further 'spin-offs', perhaps, of Walcott's response to the 'February Revolution'.

These characters invent themselves in terms of popular American 'tough-guy' movie heroes. 'The Man Who Loved Islands' (recalling Walcott's Franklin of the poem and the play), subtitled 'a three-page outline', i.e. for a film-script, is a fascinating exploration into the problem of crossing genres, poetry and narrative fiction. Its drama or plot is in his grappling with the challenge of composing such an outline, the tension between the poetic possibilities of still or long-held shots and the demand of the popular movie genre for much busy action, for the 'chaos of artifice still called the plot' (*CP*, 420). There may be an ironic pun in 'still' here. The opposite, 'moving', is the central, informing pun, precisely appropriate to the genre of moving pictures. The story must move, in both senses of the word. The question, though, is what is truly moving? May there not be

more significant movement 'in contemplation / of silvery light upon wind-worried water' (*CP*, 420), than all the action when 'we blow the tanker up and get the flames / blazing with oil, and Sophia, if she's free, / . . . / is climbing down this rope ladder, and we shoot up / from Coburn's P.O.V.?' (*CP*, 422).

The contending views are outwardly represented in the local scriptwriter-poet and the metropolitan producer-director. Cleverly, while the latter reluctantly allows the contemplative stills to slip in, the poem in effect reverses the balance and reluctantly lets in the action footage. Ultimately, the poem, a nuanced, multi-voiced, thought-provoking expression of Walcott's love of the islands, enacts a lively mixing of genres. Its primary lyric impulse nicely accommodates some of the quality of narrative prose fiction, in its brisk movement, generated by the implied lively, let's-get-on-with-it dialogue, with its tactful incorporation of the vernacular idiom typical of the real-life situation.

The idea of meaning as performed finds a memorable variant embodiment in 'The Spoiler's Return', which, second only to 'The Schooner *Flight*', stands as a major achievement in Walcott's use of creole in his poetry. In 'Return', Walcott dons the persona of one of the great calypsonians of Trinidad and Tobago, The Mighty Spoiler (Theophilus Phillip, 1926–60), and by this dramatization the poet speaks in the people's voice. Political calypso was not Spoiler's forte, but it was his 'Magistrate Try Himself' (1957), about the corruption of justice, which gave Shabine his line about 'himself as chairman investigating himself' (*CP*, 348).

The stage is Laventille (as in Walcott's poem of the same name, *CP*, 85–8), home-base of the famous Desperadoes steel orchestra mentioned in the poem. The ghost of Spoiler has been sent up from hell by Satan 'to check out [the] town' (*CP*, 432). He sits 'high' atop the railings of a bridge, and his immediate audience is the 'limers' (*CP*, 432) (idlers) who pass by. Readers familiar with the Trinidad calypso scene may also imagine the theatre of the calypso tent (performance hall). However, by placing his poet-of-the-people at a vantage point in Laventille, Walcott suggests that the under-class has a commanding view of the society and of the foibles and sins of those more highly placed than they. As John Thieme says, the poem has two mutually reinforcing points of departure, one in Caribbean

oral tradition, the other in English scribal tradition, and Walcott exploits the potential for creative interplay between the two.⁴

The first point of departure is Spoiler's calypso 'Bedbug', which won the National Calypso Crown in 1953. It turns on the fancy that if, as he has 'heard, when you die, after burial / you have to come back as some insect or animal' (the actual words of the calypso), he would wish to be a bedbug so that he could bite the nether parts of 'big fat women' (*CP*, 433). The poem extrapolates the salacious wit of this upside-down ambition – how low can one aspire? – into the resolve to 'bite' all the 'fat cats' of society. Taking up where Shabine left off, Spoiler exposes the rapaciousness of the well-to-do, the every-man-for-himself culture of corruption and graft, the politicians who have power but turn a deaf ear to the cry of the disadvantaged and the let-bad-enough-alone attitude of the acquiescent. Everything is show, play-acting, Carnival, under which mask any unseemliness may be practised.

True to the humorously hybrid nature of calypso, the poem mixes the language of the streets and the proverbial wisdom of the folk ('crab climbing crab-back in a crab-quarrel' (*CP*, 433); 'what sweet in goat-mouth sour in his behind' (*CP*, 435)) with high literary allusion and language. Oral and scribal traditions – local contemporary and classical European – are also blended in Spoiler's invocation of a tradition of satirical verse to lend weight to his own effort. When he calls on the 'Old Brigade of Satire' to 'back [him] up' (*CP*, 433), on Martial, Juvenal, Pope, Lord Rochester, the call is a gesture of good-spirited appropriation, for 'Old Brigade' – the Old Masters, so to speak – is the label for a generation of calypsonians (Attila, Executor, Lion, Tiger, *et al.*), who were rivalled by a younger, the Young Brigade, started after the Second World War, that included Lord Kitchener and The Mighty Sparrow. So at the end of the poem the list of Masters is extended to include other poets of both traditions: Dryden, Swift and Lord Byron, as well as (Lord) Maestro and (Raymond) Quevedo (the same as Attila (the Hun), mentioned earlier in the poem), the former being an outstanding exponent of political calypso. This conflation enacts Walcott's idea of 'the simultaneity of historical epochs, legends, characters'⁵ and is tellingly and wittily underscored by the wonderful coincidence that allows him to merge Spoiler with the seventeenth-century English satirist

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and his 'Satire upon Mankind'. The very fact that Spoiler identifies Rochester with the title 'Lord' also signifies the comfortable appropriation of high literature by the calypso tradition, in which 'Lord' (but never 'Earl') has been a favourite title assumed by calypsonians in their stage names – e.g. Lord Blakie, Lord Kitchener, Lord Melody. Further, in his preamble to his Warwick reading of the poem, Walcott referred to Rochester as 'another English calypsonian'.⁶

The melding of the two modes is definitively encapsulated in the engineered quotation (*CP*, 433) with its virtually imperceptible segue from Rochester to Spoiler, to which Walcott himself called attention in the preamble to his Warwick reading. In addition, Walcott said that Rochester's 'Satire' also uses 'the same metre'⁷ as 'Bedbug'. Not quite. Rochester writes in heroic couplets, very regularly and pronouncedly stressed. While 'Return' is also in couplets, a form popular with the calypso, and while there are iambic pentameters enough, there are some unequivocally four-stress lines, and in many lines where we may find iambic pentameter if we will, this would really be to impose English prosody on the verse. A creole prosody, based on Caribbean speech rhythms, will produce a four-stress line. Failure to hear the Caribbean rhythm will result in an odd and possibly confusing effect, and even the notion that the poet is not in control of the craft.

To move from 'The Spoiler's Return' to the title poem, 'The Fortunate Traveller', is to widen the focus of socio-political criticism, from local to global. The latter carries forward, with even more concentrated passion, the outrage voiced in 'North and South' at the inequity of the world economic order. Crucial topoi and intertexts reappear: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Holocaust, Apocalypse, the 'mania / of history' (*CP*, 408). In an impressively close reading, which explores the poem's rich intertextuality, Paula Burnett more than justifies her description of 'The Fortunate Traveller' as 'an impassioned and important poem for our time'.⁸ Her exposition in effect underscores the 'largeness' of the poem.

It was a brilliant move on Walcott's part to configure the didactic-homiletic motive of the poem in the form of a spy-thriller that draws resonance from both novel and film. The sense of mystery, of danger and eventual retribution that attends the shadowy protagonist from the outset, the fact that what is happening at the level of the fable is

not always clear, suggests very well the idea that covert, under-the-table operations are a feature of the North's uneven dealings with the earth's starving millions.

The unnamed protagonist is a mysterious figure. It is not clear how a Professor of English at the University of Sussex comes to be the globe-trotting agent of the North's economic hegemony. At the same time, the fact that his specialization is Jacobean drama is appropriate to the language of the poem and to the implication that revenge awaits him. That he is a professor of literature accommodates, with ironic, self-reflexive appropriateness, the section in which the poem raises doubts about the capacity of literature to represent the iniquities of the world: 'for everywhere that earth shows its rib cage / . . . / we turn away to read' (*CP*, 463). The poet thus indirectly acknowledges the danger of himself being implicated in the turning away from the full horror of man's inhumanity to man by turning it into literature, never mind his single-minded effort to make his poem speak the unvarnished horror. Here is Walcott broaching once again the problem of the transactions between word and world, art and life.

If the protagonist does represent an official international institution, then that will be a particularly telling indictment, in that either the system is being corrupted, or it is by nature unjust and uncharitable. The biblical phrase 'and have not charity' (1 Corinthians, 13) tolls, an accusation and a threat, through the poem. 'Charity' here must be understood not simply as patronizing handouts, but in the sense of true caring, of love for one's fellow man.

The persona of the poem, the ironically 'fortunate' traveller, whether agent of an exploitative capitalist system or of a flawed system of international aid, moves in comfort and with the freedom of the uncommitted, between the North's centres of power and influence and the underdeveloped countries of Africa and the Caribbean. His path repeats the old slave triangle. However, although he may run, he cannot hide. He is not really free, but is himself trapped in the system he represents – just as the 'square coffin [of his attaché case is] manacled to [his] wrist' (*CP*, 456) – and in his conscience. The indictment of the system is all the more trenchant in that it is conveyed through the consciousness of the protagonist himself. In this way, his own guilty conscience heightens and individualizes the horror of the experience. It is he who says, for

example, speaking of functionaries like himself, 'We are roaches, / riddling the state cabinets, entering the dark holes / of power, carapaced in topcoats' (*CP*, 458). The poem ends with a warning of apocalyptic retribution, couched in the language and imagery of the Book of Revelation, from which the poem's epigraph is taken.

The apocalyptic vision, as well as the human trouble that *The Fortunate Traveller* addresses, is relieved and transfigured, however momentarily, by the short poem with which the book ends – 'The Season of Phantasmal Peace'. This poem is unique in Walcott's œuvre, a visionary poem that is configured almost entirely in terms of an imaginary situation, rather than out of some natural, localized place or occasion. There are other Walcott poems with visionary moments, or of an overall visionary cast, such as 'The Bright Field' (*Sea Grapes*), but in these the vision is always a matter of a transfiguring of the natural and the everyday.

This poem imagines a moment when the travail, pain, horror and grief of human life are transcended in a world-embracing love that is peace. This vision is imaged centrally in terms of 'all the nations of birds' lifting 'the huge net of the shadows of this earth' (*CP*, 464). As they rise with the net, relieving humankind of its 'shadows', the net of shadows becomes transformed into a net of light, a radiance that transfigures the world into perfect harmony, peace and love. The mystical nature of this transfiguration is also expressed as a set of paradoxes. The light transcends the capacity of natural sight. The cries of the birds, in their 'multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues' (*CP*, 464) are 'soundless' (*CP*, 465). The moment of the vision – a knowing, self-aware fantasy-vision – is fleeting, but it is a moment outside of time, beyond seasons and vicissitude. The vision it evokes transcends and yet is instinct with the worldly condition of 'the wingless ones [human beings] / ... who shared dark holes in windows and houses' (*CP*, 465). The poem is a prayer for our time, 'for such as our earth is now' (*CP*, 465).

'MIDSUMMER'

Midsummer's title is its mother-image. The ever-shifting setting is primarily midsummer in a variety of places, and Walcott's power of description evokes a vivid sense of the season. More importantly,

midsummer becomes a metaphor of varying signification. Images of heat, of churning, teeming activity are pervasive, but also the torpor of exhaustion after such activity, and the enervation of such heat, a sun-struck stasis. The undercurrent of waves of a glaring, roiling summer sea repeating themselves incessantly but with a difference suggests an over-heated consciousness in its high summer: 'Under the brain's white coral is a seething anthill' (*M*, 40). The work is very much about the obsessive engine of poetic creativity carrying the poet along with it willy-nilly: 'Midsummer bursts / out of its [earth's] body, and its poems come unwarranted' (*M*, 18); 'When sonnets come, they come not single spies but in / battalions. They break like larvae from your boredom' (*M*, 20). The borrowing of the first sentence from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*⁹ keeps alive the force of the one word that has been changed, 'sorrows' for 'sonnets'. The images of anthills and larvae add a sinister quality to the frenzy of generation. R.W. Flint has described *Midsummer* as a 'rambling, reflective and restful collection'.¹⁰ Rambling yes, purposefully so, and reflective, but hardly restful.¹¹

The quality of movement and life in the work is enhanced by its form. It consists of some sixty-two poems,¹² all numbered, with only three also having titles. The use of numbers instead of titles fosters a sense not only of the work's cohesion, but also of its rolling forward irrepressibly in a self-renewing onward pulse. The poems vary in length within a narrow range of seventeen to twenty-eight lines. Metrically, the lines also exhibit continual flexibility around an overall discipline of five beats to the line. Some of the poems may be said to be in a loose iambic pentameter, but in general the stress pattern is irregular and unemphatic, with the scansion being optional at times, and there is a penumbra of hexameter. However we define the metre, the effect of the verse form is one of amplitude, of a spreading, unresting tide.

In enacting the compulsive hold of imagination as it obeys the will to make sense of self and the world, of self in world, the work revisits or addresses a range of experiences, private and communal, that constitute the poet's world and determine his construction of himself. In its way, it is also a spiritual autobiography, an impressionistic retrospective, 'leaves that keep trying to summarize [his] life' (*M*, 40), the trail left by what he self-deflatingly calls 'the

maundering ego' (*M*, 19). So this 'ego' is at one moment walking the 'hot streets' (*M*, 19) of Castries or Port of Spain; at another moment the poet is in St Thomas, in the US Virgin Islands, where 'the drizzle that falls is American rain, / stitching stars in the sand' and he 'fear[s] what the migrant envies' (*CP*, 486), being absorbed into America. At another moment, 'driving along / the skittering ridges of [a rain-drenched] Wales, / we carried the figure of Langland's Piers Plowman [another wanderer] on the rain-seeded glass' (*CP*, 491). At another, he is on a Spanish Caribbean island, where he feels somewhat intimidated, because 'for so much ... is the Empire envied and hated / that whether one chooses to say "*ven-thes*" or "*ven-ces*" / involves the class struggle as well' (*CP*, 496). At yet another moment, he is in James Wright's Ohio, with its 'sky so huge, its haze is violet', and 'a striped [as in the 'stars and stripes'] electric gate / patrolled by dogma and black-gloved police / decides where our devotions end and start' (*M*, 66).

In its twenty-five lines the opening poem, '1', foreshadows all that is to come in the sequence, rehearses all that has gone before in Walcott and announces two of his major topoi. They are the idea of a deep but complicated attachment to home, here imaged through the account of a return home ('here'), and the equally problematic issue of the relationship between world and word. Through close reading of '1', we may get a fair idea of Walcott's way of proceeding.

'1' conveys the feelings and thoughts of the poet-persona as the aircraft in which he is travelling brings him within sight of his destination, his second home so to speak, Port of Spain: 'The jet bores like a silverfish through volumes of cloud – / clouds that will keep no record of where we have passed' (*M*, 11). Already experience and nature are being figured as word, as writing, as text. Later the poet-persona will see, from his airborne distance, Port of Spain's 'bright suburbs fade into words', that is, into their names – 'Maraval, Diego Martin'. He will look down on 'pages of earth, the canefields set in stanzas', and 'a fast cloud of egrets / are nouns that find their branches as simply as birds' (*M*, 11). This way of seeing, of turning nature into text, will recur throughout the book. For example, on a return to Boston, he passes down 'blocks long as paragraphs' (*CP*, 489). In Wales, 'the turning disk of the fields / with their ploughed stanzas sang of a freshness lost' (*CP*, 491).

So, as the aircraft approaches for landing, the suburbs fade from view and become only the memory or idea of themselves as evoked by words. However, it may be in words that they are most truly present, most substantial, just as it is in words that they live when they go out of sight and out of lived experience. The written record, the poem, susceptible to silverfish, may be even more transient than a cloud. On the other hand, the insubstantial word may be more durable than even stone. If nature is being reduced to mere words, at the same time it is perhaps in language that we have the surest sense of the existence of things; we construct them with language; they 'really' exist for us when we name them.

This fondness for seeing things as their signs, whether word or brush stroke, together with the frequent allusion to and reflection on particular writers and their work, contributes to the literariness that has been remarked in *Midsummer*, and to the possible opinion that Walcott is privileging literature over life. This would be a simplistic reading. Besides, as Terry Eagleton remarks, Walcott is effective in his 'device of putting his own self-confessed literariness into ironic question'.¹³ The question of the relationship of word, or brush stroke, to world is Walcott's subject. On the one hand, there is his feeling that it is through his poetry that the poet comes into deepest touch with life, and in that sense life truly begins when the poet, the painter, falls 'in love with art' (*CP*, 86). On the other hand, there is always the nagging feeling that the word can never definitively represent the world, and that 'They never align, nature and your / own nature' (*M*, 19). Then again, it may also be ironic that Walcott sees himself as knowingly trying to avoid literariness, to be as it were 'antipoetic', in *Midsummer* (*CDW*, 120).

The question of the substantiality or insubstantiality of language and historical records links with the issue of history, in the image of 'the sea's mirror', which, like the clouds, 'will keep no record of where we have passed'. The idea is repeated in 'XLVII', in the reference to 'Ocean, / whose pride is that no man makes his mark on her' (*M*, 67). This idea and image take us back to 'The Sea Is History' (*SAK*), which had figured the idea of the sea as a consciousness that contains, absorbs and transcends history. In *Franklin* Morris had said: 'We should be like the sea. With no memory' (*F*, 12). Of course, we cannot be, least of all Walcott,

for whom 'a man lives half of life, / [and] the other half is memory' (*CP*, 243).

The implicit introduction of the Walcott/West Indian quarrel with history segues easily into acknowledgement of the pain of West Indian history, and the West Indian's imputed lack of history, through acerbic allusion to two Victorian writers and their travel books on the West Indies. When the aircraft breaks through the clouds,

... a hole in the parchment opens, and suddenly, in a vast
dereliction of sunlight, there's that island known
to the traveller Trollope, and the fellow traveller Froude,
for making nothing. Not even a people. (*M*, 11)

In these lines, the poem reopens the wound of colonization. The island is not just Trinidad, but any British West Indian island, and, as 'fellow traveller' implies, Trollope and Froude represent colonialist discourse and ideology.

In taking on Anthony Trollope (*The West Indies and the Spanish Main*, 1859) and James Anthony Froude (*The English in the West Indies*, 1887), Walcott returns to the sticking-point by which he and other West Indian writers of his generation¹⁴ have been famously exercised, and to which critics never tire of referring. The notorious statement in question is the passage from Froude that was used approvingly by V.S. Naipaul as epigraph to *The Middle Passage* (1962), the passage which ends, 'There are no people there [in the West Indies] in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.' We have already noted how Naipaul, extending Froude's notion, sharpened the charge of nothingness.¹⁵

The blight of colonial discourse is the subject of 'LI', to the extent, in particular, that it shows up in the West Indian writer's feeling of having to free himself from the burden of history and the 'superiority' of the literature of the colonizer. The poem begins, 'Since all of your work was really an effort to appease / the past, a need to be admitted among your peers' (*CP*, 505). The poem works over, with trenchant sarcasm, the idea of the West Indian as 'mimic man', as monkey, an idea which had been central to *Dream* and had featured in 'Laventille' and 'At Last' (*SG*, 88–90). The ideology of racism is integral to this subject. 'LI' observes that 'a raceless critic is

a primate's dream' (*CP*, 505). Ironically, by the end of the poem the critic himself is seen as ape: 'Already, up in that simian Academe, / a chimp in bifocals, his lower lip a jut, / tears misting the lenses, is turning your *œuvres Complètes*' (*CP*, 505). Walcott uses the racist discourse of colonialism to transcend that discourse, although one might put the case differently and say that in order to get beyond that discourse he has to use its terms. In addition, his manoeuvre revalues the ape as representing some necessary primal grounding with earth and life which humanity/the poet must rediscover if he is to become himself: 'your jaw must droop / and your knuckles scrape the ground of your native place' (*CP*, 505). This idea was active in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

To return to 'I', the striking oxymoron in 'dereliction of sunlight' signifies at one and the same time the marginalization, abandonment and imputed nothingness of the island(s) as well as the pristine blessing of possibility and primal energy. The sunlight becomes a redemptive, recurrent metaphor. For instance, in 'XLIX' the poet grieves over a 'storm-darkened village with fences of crucified tin', but by the end of the poem sunlight breaks out: 'Though I curse the recurrence of each shining omen, / the sun will come out, and warm up my right hand [to continue writing]' (*CP*, 503). With a disjunction characteristic of Walcott's method, 'I' picks up the sunlight image to make a new point, one which constitutes, indirectly, a consolation against dereliction. It is that the same impartial sunlight shines on margin as on centre, on the dispossessed as on the affluent, on South as on North: 'Our sunlight is shared by Rome / and your white paper, Joseph [Brodsky]' (*M*, 11). As poem XLIII, part v says, 'there is no ideology in the sunlight' (*CP*, 500), as there is, say, in the judgements of Froude and Trollope. This idea will not in itself refurbish the derelict villages, or put bread in the mouths of the poor, but it is an idea which, if acknowledged on all sides, may promote the climate of consciousness that will ensure a more economically just world. The idea that the sunlight, like the sea, transcends history is implied in the observation in line 14 that 'light has never had epochs' (*M*, 11).

Midsummer's procedure of directly addressing Joseph Brodsky (1940–96) not only focusses the themes of poetry, friendship, wandering, exile and the tyranny of dictators and totalitarian systems,

but also enhances the conversational dimension and frame of the work, with Brodsky being directly addressed again at the end of the book. It is as if we are to overhear throughout the work the voice of the poet sharing his thoughts with his poet-friend then in Rome. The colloquiality of *Midsummer* within its formal architecture is noted by Flint when he remarks on Walcott's 'choice of [approximately] 50 very loosely rhymed and scanned "sonnets" of predominantly five-stress lines'.¹⁶ As Eagleton observes, although the work is 'verbally elaborate', with Walcott's characteristic 'metaphorical depth', it is 'colloquial in the easy shiftings of [its] loose metrical forms'.¹⁷

The brotherhood of poetry and the equality of men are suggested by the image of the same impartial sunlight shining on Port of Spain as on Rome, an idea that was irradiatingly central to 'The Bright Field' (*SG*, 77–8). In '11' Walcott is drawn to imagine the Rome in which Brodsky is writing his 'Roman Elegies'. This 'journey' to Rome initiates an irregular series of visits, in memory or imagination, to other places, to 'elsewhere'. He will, he says, 'let the imagination range wherever / its correspondences take it' (*M*, 18), which statement is an apt description of *Midsummer*'s method. So, for instance, in 'VIII' he is with Bruegel on 'a Flemish road fenced with poplars', and 'grind[ing] with Rimbaud the white shale of Charleroi' (*M*, 18); and we note how 'shale of Charleroi' carries the sound of the grinding. In 'v' the poet is in the USA, whether in New York City, where 'the dazed high-rises / rock to reggae and salsa', or 'walk[ing] the breezy scrub dunes from Montauk to Amagansett' (*M*, 15).

These travels are not the luxury of the tourist or the career of the travel writer. Walcott's engagement with foreign places is an aspect of his self-exploration, which is to say, his understanding of the world. His views of the landscapes and cultures he traverses are those of a Caribbean man with his particular history. He values those places of memory or imagination both for their difference and for the extent to which they make him realize that 'midsummer is the same thing everywhere' (*M*, 47), in other words, that humankind is fundamentally the same everywhere. And when he returns home to the Caribbean, it is not to take a pause from the quest, but to experience once more the disturbance that can go with deep attachment to home.

Brodsky's presence in *Midsummer* is functional also to the extent that Brodsky is a kindred spirit, through whose persona Walcott can

consider and address his own situation. In this regard, the closely linked themes of wandering, exile and the problematic relationship to home are also figured in the person of Brodsky. There are poems in which, when Walcott is speaking about Brodsky, we can feel Walcott's own sense of himself as a sub-text.

The Walcott who knows a deep devotion to home, who 'can understand Borges's blind love for Buenos Aires' ('VI'), can empathize with his displaced friend's exile. Brodsky's exile will also bring nearer home to him the dread of the tyranny which caused it, and which Walcott had already evoked in a few of the poems in *Sea Grapes*, and in 'Forest of Europe' (*SAK*), dedicated to Brodsky. It is the tyranny that manifests itself in systems that 'lose / sight of the single human through the cause' (*CP*, 376), in the 'black-gloved police / [who] decide . . . where our devotions end and start' (*M*, 66), in the terror of the Holocaust, chillingly imagined in 'XLVI', in the spectre of totalitarianism in the Caribbean ('XLIII', part vii).

Just as it is possible to feel exiled at home, so the person in the grip of what Lorna Goodison has called 'quest fever'¹⁸ may be the same one whose home-anchor lies deepest and heaviest. This tension is the Shabine factor in Walcott, which sharpens the poignancy of the 'one theme' he professes: 'The arrow, the longing, the lunging heart' (*CP*, 361). The theme and the tension were signalled in the early 'The Harbour' (*CP*, 7) and tightened the climactic moment of departure in *Another Life*: 'Earth-heart, I prayed, / nerves of raw fibre, / uproot me, yet / . . . / make of my heart an ark, / let my ribs bear / all, doubled by / memory' (*CP*, 250). The tension is nicely encapsulated in *Tiepolo's Hound*, in the image of men as 'moving trees': 'but we, as moving trees, must root somewhere, / and there our separation shows its seam' (*TH*, 160). The poet is by definition a wanderer. Not surprisingly, the Homer persona which Walcott sometimes puts on and cherishes is described in *Midsummer* as 'That old wave-wanderer with his drowsing gaze . . . / a pelican rocked on the stern of an empty pirogue, / a salt-grizzled gaffer, shaking rain from his wings' (*M*, 47).

Now, in 'I', as the poet comes within sight of Port of Spain, landmarks appear and then 'fade', depending on the plane's shifts of direction. This movement reflects the wanderer's excitement at nearing home. Features that he distinguishes below seem 'tiny' at

this distance, a circumstance which suggests their vulnerability, their need for the poet's care. At the same time, the distance, despite proximity, suggests the problematic aspect of the attachment between poet and place. The distance and the dreamlike quality of the experience of seeing the loved place from this vantage point are heightened by the fact that no sound rises this far from the bustling city. However, '[t]he lowering window resounds' (*M*, 11) with the gathering noise of the jet engines, a symbol for the increased pounding of emotion in the traveller's heart. In the final seconds of touchdown, as the aircraft hurtles on its downward slope, it is as if the poet's welter of feelings overwhelms him – 'It comes too fast, this shelving sense of home' (*M*, 11) – just as we seem to have little or no control over our bodies in the final moments of a plane's landing. This sensation reaches a culmination with the actual touchdown, when our bodies are bounced and shaken by the plane's juddering, which is the juddering of the poet's heart – 'as / the trundling tires keep shaking and shaking the heart' (*M*, 11). The fierce tension between the forward thrust of the plane and the counter-force of its brakes represents the intensity of mixed feelings shaking the poet. Ultimately, though, what shakes and overcomes him is the force of his love for home. The disturbance is affirmation; his love finds its ground, 'a world that still stands' (*M*, 11) against all the precipitate and dislocating motion before and around it in the poem.

So, as *Midsummer* proceeds, the poet's imagination travels outward and back, outward and back, between home and elsewhere, between South and North. The final poem, 'LIV', is another poem of homing, in the sense that the focus is on the home place and the poet's relationship to it. It is another affirmation of identity, as strong as, but more complex than that in 'Sainte Lucie' (*Sea Grapes*): 'The midsummer sea, the hot pitch road, this grass, these shacks that made me' (*CP*, 510). The demonstratives 'this' and 'these', which attract the relative 'that' into the demonstrative mode, enhance the definitive force of this opening line. The identity that is being declared is all the more deep because it is fraught with empathetic pain for the loved place and people. The 'hot pitch road' and the 'shacks' connote hardship. The poet drives through 'jungle and razor grass' as he goes deeper into the heartland, where 'wood lice are humming in the sacred wood' (*CP*, 510). The wood lice suggest

the principle of decay, corruption and death in nature, and in what is otherwise seen as a tropical paradise. The 'sacred wood' is also poetry, which must deal with decay, corruption and death if it is to deal adequately with life.

But always, surprisingly, beauty and blessedness rise up out of decay, and the poet sees a 'choir' of 'yellow butterflies rising' out of the 'rotting logs', just as leavened bread will rise, and as poetry, leavened by love, will rise to speak such epiphanies. The miracle of the butterflies almost makes him believe again in the doctrine of the Resurrection, and he feels a pang of regret for 'the child[hood] faith [he] betrayed, or the faith that betrayed [him]' (*CP*, 510). Here again is the betrayal theme that runs through Walcott's poetry. But although he may no longer believe in the specifics of the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, he can now sing his 'Nunc dimittis' and depart in peace, for he has 'seen' the assurance of 'salvation', for his people, for himself and the world, even if the assurance comes not from the Word of religion, but from the word of poetry. The 'bread of life' metaphor takes us directly back to 'Forest of Europe' and Brodsky: 'what's poetry, if it is worth its salt, / but a phrase men can pass from hand to mouth?' (*CP*, 377). The poet can now leave the work, with an intimate affirmation to his exiled poet-friend, but an assurance that carries with it an acceptance of pain and loss: 'Ah, Joseph, though no man ever dies in his own country, / the grateful grass will grow thick from his heart' (*CP*, 510). An enigmatic affirmation. The 'Ah' pulls in opposite directions; it is both a joyful exclamation and a sigh of inevitable loss. The first part of the statement seems contrary to normal experience. Surely many persons do die in their own country. Or is it that, at a deeper level, we are all exiles, the level at which each person dies alone? The idea deepens the consolation offered by the last line. The alliterating 'g' underscores the purposive thrust of the life force. In the final analysis, home is in the heart.

'THE ARKANSAS TESTAMENT'

To move from *Midsummer* to *The Arkansas Testament* is to be immediately struck by the change in verse form. In the latter, the first seven poems and more than half of the total number are in

quatrains, with almost all using the *abab* rhyme scheme. Most, too, exploit the short line, almost always trimeter. One may trace Walcott's prosodic journey, volume by volume, noticing how each has its distinctive formal/stylistic signature. However, the story is not so much one of evolution or 'progress' as of the continual acting out of a dialectic of style and form – plain speaking against oblique and densely layered utterance, free verse against formal, traditional metrics, informality against oratorical eloquence. This dialectic, not quite resolved, is evident in a poem like the Audenesque 'Eulogy to W.H. Auden', which confirms that Walcott's use of the quatrain owes a direct debt to Auden. However, while the metrics, stanza pattern and the tone of the language have the formalized ease of Auden's quatrains, that ease is somewhat obstructed by the metaphorical and allusive density of Walcott's poem.

In the 'Eulogy', Walcott, addressing Auden, says: 'but you, who left each feast at nine, / knew war, like free verse, is a sign / of awful manners' (*AT*, 62). Remembering that some of Walcott's best poems are in free verse, one is aware of the dialectic of form informing these lines. The patrician colloquialism of 'awful' adds to the tone of relaxed formality which typifies the manipulation of the quatrain in poems like this, the low-key but well-mannered diction and idiom working against the strictures and regularity of the stanza-pattern. Walcott's sustained engagement with the quatrain in *The Arkansas Testament* is an expression of his insistence on the notion of poetry as discipline, a craft which one has to learn and work at. He never sees himself as too old to go to school to the Old Masters, and he is ever striving 'For more care in the craft of verse' (*AT*, 6). The Audenesque poems of this period are a mature repayment of Walcott's apprenticeship to Auden, which began to be evident in such early pieces as 'Berceuse':

Lip from lip we learn to use
The unwilling supple lie;
Love, untarnished with abuse
Lends each idiot alchemy.¹⁹

Walcott's observation concerning Brodsky's use of Auden is pertinent here: 'Whenever Brodsky sounds like Auden it is not in imitation but in homage, and the homage is openly confessed'

(WTS, 138). The mature Walcott handles the quatrain with remarkable flexibility. So, picking up the 'manners' of the 'Eulogy to W.H. Auden', the form lends itself easily to the playful, sophisticated ironies of 'French Colonial: "Vers de Société"':

Maurois, or Mauriac – but not Malraux,
the morose Marxist, prophet of *Man's Fate* –
in something I read many years ago
that stuck, without an accurate memory of the date,

compared the symmetry of a work of art
to an hourglass. The French are very good at these
sort of thing; every other frog is Descartes:
Cogito ergo, that precise *bêtise*. (AT, 75)

The grammatically incorrect 'these', needed to rhyme with *bêtise*, may also be part of the sophisticated play of wit, mimicking a French pronunciation of 'this'.

The Arkansas Testament confirms the extent to which Walcott's themes and ideas have become preoccupation, how much he has set his stamp on them, how often he returns to them, usually to rework them with arresting differences. The division of *The Arkansas Testament* into two sections, 'Here' and 'Elsewhere', is a case in point. In a simplified description, the division is between poems about the Caribbean and poems about other places. As has already been suggested, virtually all of Walcott's later collections may be divided or rearranged in this way. However, as also argued earlier, the relationship between 'here' and 'elsewhere' is more complex than a simple opposition between the two terms would suggest. Something of this complexity is evident in the serendipitous error in the blurb on the jacket of the US edition of the book, which tells the reader that the collection 'is divided into two parts – "There," verse evoking the poet's native Caribbean, and "Elsewhere."' The error reinforces the idea that, in a crucial sense, 'here' is always 'there'. The very act of defining it distances it. Besides, with Walcott, 'here' becomes increasingly a place to which one *returns*, a place one has repeatedly to reclaim, in an effort made more and more precarious and compulsive as the gulf of memory widens.

At the same time, 'elsewhere' always takes its meaning from the point of view of 'here'. In each of the poles the other is subsumed.

Some of the poems could with equal justification have been placed in either section, and in many the active engagement of 'here' with 'elsewhere' is the informing principle. In the poem entitled 'Elsewhere', the poet-persona reflects ruefully, and with an increasing sense of terror and threat, on the denial of individual freedom and the proscription of writers in some unspecified 'somewhere', which, of course, is elsewhere. The difference is supposedly comforting, at least for the moment: 'And here we are free for a while, but / elsewhere, in one-third, or one-seventh / of this planet, a summary rifle butt / breaks a skull into the idea of a heaven / where nothing is free' (*AT*, 66–7). Although in an obvious sense the poem is set 'elsewhere', it is in a more crucial sense about the persona 'here' apprehending the terrors of 'elsewhere.' Elsewhere is already here, and the poem enacts this realization:

Through these black bars
hollowed faces stare. Fingers
grip the cross bars of these stanzas
and it is here, because somewhere else
their stares fog into oblivion
thinly ... (*AT*, 67)

The faceless 'it', the tyranny, is already 'here', in the poem.

Also involved in the interplay of the two locations is the dialectic of cultural and social identity, especially as it relates to geography, the dialogue of self and other in the context of the sense of place. 'Here' and 'elsewhere' are reference points of the one mind, which cherishes its rootedness in a particular corner of earth, but which at the same time insists on its free passage through the world. On the one hand, the poet will be happy to identify himself by the street vendor's exclamation that he (the poet revisiting his native land at age fifty) 'love[s] home harder than youth!' (*AT*, 8). And yet, on the other hand, he will say that 'To have loved one horizon is insularity, / it blindfolds vision, it narrows experience' (*AT*, 79). The imagination will travel, and Shabine in 'The Schooner *Flight*' spoke more truly and less regretfully than one might otherwise think, when he said, 'I have no nation now but the imagination' (*CP*, 350).

Curiously enough, both 'here' and 'elsewhere' are negotiated from the point of view of the transient. In the accounts of both 'countries,' we are likely to find the poet-persona *travelling through*,

working out of a hotel room (sometimes a beach house), which is at one and the same time an emblem of his precarious, 'floating' condition and a protection or refuge, a mask of anonymity. In the very first poem, 'The Lighthouse', the poet wanders through Castries at night, reliving old times in the painful awareness of how much he has grown away from that past. This anguish is typified by the awkward, hollow joviality of his meeting with a friend from schooldays, a brilliant actor who, never having left home, was never able to fulfil his promise, and is now a ghost of his former self. But the successful poet who grieves for him has, whether he knows it or not, also become a sort of ghost, a revenant. When they 'split up on the dark street' (a resonant, widening metaphor) the poet returns 'to the black promontory / of Vigie', presumably to a hotel room, whose 'air conditioner's / freezing' excludes 'the heat of home' (*AT*, 6).

A hotel room also claims the poet in the richly meditative 'The Light of the World', which, along with 'The Lighthouse', extends Walcott's line of sadly ironic homecoming poems. On a visit to St Lucia, the poet takes a minibus, a 'sixteen-seater transport' (*AT*, 48), that plies between Castries and Gros Ilet. The poem turns on the word-play afforded by 'transport.'²⁰ It is, in the first place, St Lucian vernacular for the kind of public passenger vehicle on which he is riding. However, he experiences a transport of love for the people, the common people, who are his travelling companions, a feeling individualized in the intense, unspoken emotion that overcomes him for a beautiful young woman.

The poet wishes that he could transport the black beauty and all the other people on the bus into some easier life. Ironically, though, they have their own means of psycho-spiritual transport, such as the Bob Marley song that is 'rocking on the transport's stereo' (*AT*, 48) and the hope of heaven that is part of their Christian faith. In the end, it is as if they do not need the poet. When he alighted, 'They went on in their transport, they left me on earth' (*AT*, 51). He is saddened and angered at the realization of the gap between him and the common folk. 'The Light of the World' is a powerful enactment of the pain of that 'ambition' which was his 'longing to share their lives' (*WTS*, 20).

In his evocation of the woman's beauty, Walcott characteristically reconstructs her as a work of art, 'like a statue, like a black Delacroix's / *Liberty Leading the People*' (*AT*, 48), like a Benin sculpture.

Walcott's praise poem to the beauty of a black woman comes now, in the fullness of time, as fulfilment of the recognition that had been presented to him by the sight of Harry Simmons' 'kerchiefed, ear-ringed portrait, Albertina' beside the 'plaster-of-Paris Venus' (*CP*, 147) in Simmons' studio. As the woman on the bus is the spiritual daughter of Albertina, so Helen of *Omeros* will be daughter to both.

The beauty of black women – 'the ebony of a high-boned cheek' (*AT*, 54) – is also sung in 'Oceano Nox', which widens to a general celebration of the beauty in blackness. Here Walcott acknowledges that this recognition necessitated a change of vision on his part: 'now all is changing but my focus was / once on the full moon, not what surrounds the moon' (*AT*, 53), i.e. 'the black circumference around her rings / that radiate from black invisibly' (*AT*, 53–4). Now, putting to his own use Marlowe's line 'Black is the beauty of the brightest day',²¹ he celebrates not the moon but the blackness that surrounds her. At the end of the poem, as a new day breaks out of the moon-crazed nightmare of history (shades of Makak), 'parishes of birds / test a new tongue, because these are their shores' (*AT*, 55).

'Oceano Nox' exorcizes the ghosts of the borrowed moon mythology which had once filled the poet's head. Along with such poems as 'Gros-Ilet', 'The Whelk Gatherers' and 'White Magic', 'Oceano Nox' acknowledges the capacity of Caribbean imagination and language to fashion worlds, to interpret the world. 'White Magic', for instance, finds in the folklore of St Lucia – such as he had put to creative use in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* – a mythopoeic imagination no different in kind or quality from that of the classical-Christian mythologies which have dominated Western literature and featured in his own poetry. As the cynical last line puts it: 'Our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature' (*AT*, 39).

In Walcott's re-enactment of return to home ground, a leading theme is language, which provides another of those dualities on which his imagination thrives. So, in eulogizing Auden, he will declare again his love of 'the English tongue' (*AT*, 64), 'despite your Empire's wrong' (*AT*, 63), and will acknowledge as a factor in his poetic beginnings 'the hoisted chords of Wesley' (*AT*, 63). Yet when, in 'Sainte Lucie', he had cried, 'Come back to me, / my language' (*CP*, 310), it was Saint Lucian patois that he was recalling. In 'Cul de

Sac Valley' and 'A Latin Primer' he is willing to acknowledge that the distance which separates him from the beloved common folk of his 'here' may be measured in terms of language, which for a poet may be the most crucial measurement. In 'A Latin Primer' he remembers himself as a young schoolmaster 'in tweed jacket and tie' (*AT*, 22), teaching Latin at his old school, and he realizes, in hindsight, that:

The discipline I preached
made me a hypocrite;
their lithe black bodies beached,
would die in dialect . . . (*AT*, 23)

In 'Cul de Sac Valley', as he crafts his quatrains to 'echo [the] settlement / of unpainted wood', he hears the local trees

hissing, *What you wish
from us will never be,
your words is English,
is a different tree.* (*AT*, 10)

The self-knowledge and self-assurance with which the trees (the people) speak are underscored by the epiphanic climax of 'A Latin Primer', when the frigate bird with which the poem begins, an icon which he had chosen from the 'distant literatures' (*AT*, 21), becomes its St Lucian patois self,

named with the common sense
of fishermen: sea scissors,
Fregata magnificens,
ciseau-la-mer, the patois
for its cloud-cutting course . . . (*AT*, 23-4)

The patois name signifies the people's capacity for metaphor, the sufficiency of their language to name their world.

The poet's pain-deep reconnection with native roots, the love of home ground sharpened by a sense of estrangement, finds its fitting obverse in the book's title poem, itself a hard-won testament of identity. In twenty-four stanzas, each of sixteen lines (except for the last which has seventeen) of irregularly rhyming trimeter, the poet wrestles with his feelings for and about America. It speaks for the black person in general, but particularly for the black person in

America: 'this, Sir, is my Office / my Arkansas Testament / . . . / my people's predicament' (*AT*, 116). To borrow words from 'The Bright Field', this later poem bears an impressive weight of 'mercy for the anonymity / of every self humbled by massive places' (*SG*, 77). The poem's imaginative felicity expresses itself in characteristic Walcott manner, in the way in which he turns specific circumstantial images to powerful metaphoric use. For example, 'On a ridge over Fayetteville, / . . . is a white-hot electric cross' (*AT*, 107). This 'white-neon crucifix' (*AT*, 108) becomes his own cross of race and the burning cross of the Klu Klux Klan.

The poem is a narrative in which nothing much happens by way of external event. The poet checks into a motel in Fayetteville, Arkansas on a midwinter evening. He awakens before dawn. At first light he walks to a nearby café to get a cup of coffee. The sun is already up and the city beginning to go about its business when he returns to his motel room. He switches on the TV set to the news on the *Today* show.

This uneventful plot is the occasion for a harrowing mind-journey into the racial nightmare of America. He suffers no racial insult or discrimination during the twelve hours or so that the narrative covers, but there is no need for him to do so. It is telling enough that merely to be in that place, alone, a stranger in a strange land, a black man in a white enclave of the South, brings an upsurge of fear, suspicion, humiliation, bitterness and even hatred – all of which constitute a sort of self-contempt, which is the ultimate horror. The testament is also a confession of these demeaning feelings – 'my two cupfuls of Cowardice' (*AT*, 116). It also constitutes an expression of identity; in the bathroom he thinks of 'a place for / disposable shavers as well / as my own disposable people!' (*AT*, 107).

In an interview with Walcott, Waldemar Januszczak has said that 'The Arkansas Testament was about a choice. He had been thinking of taking American citizenship . . . But after the heart-searching recorded [in the poem] he opted for [presumably to retain] a [St Lucian] passport.'²²

My shadow's scribbled question
on the margin of the street
asks, Will I be a citizen
or an afterthought of the state? (*AT*, 114)

In its discretion, the poem does not report Walcott's decision on the question of whether or not to take US citizenship. For the purposes of the poem, it is the heart-searching that matters, the imaginative re-enactment of the dilemma of feelings.

The poem ends opening out. When the poet-persona switches on the TV set, the morning news is being prefaced by a sequence of 'stills' of the sun rising across America, from 'the waves of Narragansett' on the eastern seaboard to 'the huge organ pipes of sequoias, / [and] the Pacific' (*AT*, 117). These lustrous, heart-uplifting vistas counter the narrow-mindedness, the mean-spiritedness and hatred to which the poem has been reacting. They suggest an America which it is still possible for the poet to love and to enter imaginatively. Indeed, the whole poem is a feat of that imaginative entry, no less when it is recording those features that contribute to the feeling of alienation.

In other poems in the section 'Elsewhere', Walcott's imagination appropriates other landscapes, contemporary or historical, making them live for him through his experience of 'here'. For example, in 'Streams' he identifies with a Wales in which he can recognize 'the colonial condition' (*AT*, 81), can hear 'a language / built of wet stones and mists / in each stubborn bilingual sign', and 'under slag hills the rage / of coal-black abolitionists' (*AT*, 80). This poem is a companion-piece to 'Wales' (*The Fortunate Traveller*).

In 'Summer Elegies' and 'A Propertius Quartet' the poet slips easily into the mask of Propertius: urbane, witty, down-to-earth, conversational, poignant; and in 'Menelaus' into that of the fabled old cuckold as he rages in retrospect over the 'Ten years. Wasted in quarrel for sea-grey eyes. A whore's' (*AT*, 101). In poems like these the essential landscape is the landscape of the heart, and one or two of the finest pieces in the book, like 'Winter Lamps' and 'For Adrian', are not concerned with exploring the relationship between spatial or temporal 'here' and 'elsewhere'. Both 'Winter Lamps' and 'For Adrian' are good examples of Walcott's characteristic negotiation between the natural speaking voice and the strict discipline of form, whether the Audenesque quatrains of the former or the unrhymed couplets (though with the occasional suggestion of a half-rhyme cutting across couplets) of the latter, with their irregular stress pattern and long lines.

'Winter Lamps' is about the loss and emptiness at the end of a marriage. It describes the thoughts of the poet-persona as he walks reluctantly home to an empty, cheerless house in frozen, snow-covered Brookline (where Walcott lived for many years). The fact that it gets dark early in winter images the idea of the premature ending of the marriage. The sense of loss is deepened by reference to an earlier moment of loss, as he remembers the hospital 'in which [their] child was lost', a reference no doubt to 'Early Pompeian' (*The Fortunate Traveller*). Walcott's elegiac versatility is nowhere shown with more piercing radiance or finer surprise of conception than in 'For Adrian'. It is an elegy for a child, but its voice is the voice of the child, who, with a childlike directness and simplicity, seeks to reassure those who mourn for him. He speaks out of the wisdom of 'the secret that is only a silence', which he shares 'with the tyrants of the earth, with the man who piles rags / in a creaking cart, and goes around a corner / of a square at dusk' (*AT*, 88).

Narrative variations: Omeros, The Odyssey, The Bounty, Tiepolo's Hound

In his 1958 statement concerning his sonnet sequence 'Tales of the Islands', Walcott, as we will recall, had said, 'I suppose the idea is to do away with the prerogative of modern prose in narration.'¹ Thirty-five years later, when asked whether he felt, when writing *Omeros*, as if he was writing a novel, he replied: 'Not a novel, but I have felt for a long time that poetry has surrendered too much of what it used to do. The novel used to be an epic poem' (CDW, 191). As with most aspects of his poetics, he seeks, perhaps with some overstatement, to give his writerly interest in narrative a Caribbean grounding: 'What remains in the Caribbean, and in Caribbean fiction, is the human element of telling a story. . . I think that contemporary culture has absolutely lost the idea of narration. . .'²

Not a novel, but a narrative poem with novelistic features. The recuperation of narrative in poetry, while satisfying 'the basic need'³ for storytelling, and thereby, perhaps, giving the poet a sense of touching the popular pulse, would also allow for expansiveness, a large sweep of theme and action, a breadth of representation of nature and society. *Another Life*, *Omeros* (1990), *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000) and *The Prodigal* (2004) are the major achievements to date in this project. The experiment, which had its smaller landmark moments in works like 'Tales of the Islands', and 'The Schooner *Flight*', is an experiment in the interplay and dialogue of genres. The four major works are all searchingly self-aware, conscious of their peculiarities of mode, of the challenge of categorization which they represent.

The Odyssey: A Stage Version (1993) is a rather different matter, but still conveniently considered alongside *Omeros* and *Tiepolo's Hound* in terms of Walcott's interest in the possibilities and challenges of

narrative and the interplay of genres. Besides, more or less contemporaneous with *Omeros*, it constitutes with the poem a culmination of Walcott's lifelong involvement with Homer and the classics. *The Bounty* (1997), a collection of short, primarily lyric poems, is an interlude of sorts in the sequence of long narratives, but no less serious than they. It contributes to the continuity and variety of themes and formal concerns.

'OMEROS'

Omeros is monumental, but not monolithic. In its capaciousness it is inexhaustibly accommodating of scrutiny. It invites one to wander about in it and is itself of a perambulatory character. Not surprisingly, critics have been exercised by the question as to what sort of a poem it is, and more particularly the question as to whether it should be called an epic or not.⁴ The issue has been fuelled partly by Walcott's own understandable resistance to the label 'epic', notwithstanding all the obvious and not so obvious marks of indebtedness to Homer. Shortly before the poem was first published, in answer to the question 'Is this an epic poem?' Walcott had replied, 'Yes. I would think that the design of it, yes.' But then he immediately qualified this, by drawing attention to one of the distinctive features of the poem: 'It's not like one long poem with a hero. In an epic, you presume that there is no narrator, but I am in this, coming in and out' (*CDW*, 174). Later, noting that the epic hero is driven by a sense of 'political destiny',⁵ he remarks, 'So...you couldn't say that I've written an epic on this guy, Achille, who goes out to – I don't know what he's going to do!' But then, referring to Achille's battle with the hurricane, he argues that 'a natural element is more challenging than an army. You can perhaps face an army. You can't face a hurricane. And that's more epical.'⁶ Pertinent here is Gregson Davis' view that Walcott 'is not actually "renouncing" epic so much as redefining it and, in the process, demonstrating the fundamental fluidity of the whole concept of genre'.⁷

The poem may be described from a Bakhtinian perspective as a novelization of epic. Walcott acknowledges the debt *Omeros* owes to some of 'the best turn-of-the century prose, in Conrad and Kipling',

as well as to Hemingway, 'the only one to let you see the Caribbean the way it is, to feel it and smell it'.⁸ The storytelling mode recurs throughout the poem, in the voice of one character or another. Significantly, the poem begins with Philoctete telling tourists the story of how the woodcutters cut down the giant trees from which canoes will be made. On his dream visit to Africa, Achille listens to a griot.

The continual variety, shift and dialogue of voices, explicit and implied, and the concomitant friction of class interests which this dialogue represents; the realization of landscape and social lifestyle, and the exploration of character within those contexts; the gusto in the description of physical action, and this contrasted with lyrical evocations of place and person; the technical tour de force of prosody, the counterpointing and orchestrating of different stories – these are some of the aspects of craft which together contain and negotiate a wide sweep of ideas. The overlapping of time frames, the compression and expansion of time, the interweaving of the preternatural with the realistic, suggest that concept of 'poetic time... a time at once linear and labyrinthine, uncertain and inconstant',⁹ which José Saramago, the Portuguese novelist, says that he seeks to cultivate.

The geographical sweep of the poem, cutting across large expanses of historical time, the visual excitement of physical action, landscape and vivid, sensuous detail, the kaleidoscope of voices, the interweaving of stories – the amalgam of these features is reminiscent of cinematic élan. Walcott has observed that his 'editing' of the material, the quick cuts between times and locations, helps to propel the poem forward (*CDW*, 191). At the same time, while the narrative moves forward, it also has a spatial integrity, like a painting. Walcott has described the juxtaposition of segments, like panels, as making the poem like a mural (*CDW*, 191). In addition, as with *Another Life*, the network of key images and symbols (journey, wound, sea swift, iguana and so on), interlocking story with story, lends all the movements a kind of simultaneity.

The narrative propulsion of *Omeros* also owes much to its verse form, which exhibits Walcott's bent for blending tradition and innovation. Walcott has described the verse form of *Omeros* as combining 'rough hexameter', in homage to Homer, and 'rough

terza rima', in homage to Dante.¹⁰ In addition, each chapter is divided into three sections or poems of varying length. The sheer stamina of maintaining this structure, with little sense of strain, is impressive. 'Rough' is an inverse euphemism, so to speak, that signifies the flexibility which Walcott brings to the chosen forms, relaxing them to the inflections of the modern speaking voice and a range of linguistic registers. The long line carries the narrative forward in an easy, brisk flow, threaded and propelled by the self-renewing, endlessly varied and largely unobtrusive, irregular rhyme. Brad Leithauser, who has written excellently on the poem's prosody, and particularly its rhyme, suggests, 'One might go as far as to call [the poem] rhyme-driven.'¹¹

With regard to the poem's wide-ranging content, Leithauser says, 'Somewhere toward the close of *Omeros* the reader sees that the various branches are never going to wind up belonging to a single trunk. . .'¹² This perception is all the more likely if one begins by reading the poem as being essentially about the story of Achilles, Helen and Hector, a reworking of Homer, with various more or less related stories tacked on to it. A different perspective emerges if we take Walcott at his word in his insistence that the poem is, above everything else, an act of homage to St Lucia. In the context of this homage, every episode, every shift, however seemingly digressive, may be seen to fit. In this perspective, the 'over-story', which then takes in all the other stories, is the story, as much in what is elided as in what is told, of the poet-narrator's challenged love for his island, his views of it from within and from without. In this perspective, it is not just that an intriguing dimension is added by having the poet enter the poem from time to time as another minor character. On the contrary, his is the overarching point of view, managing his fiction from inside it, fully aware that it is *his* fiction, his fiction of himself, 'since every "I" is a / fiction finally' (*O*, 28).

If wandering and questing constitute a major motif of the poem, he is the ultimate wanderer who contains all the other voyagers: 'The book leaves the Caribbean when Achilles goes to Africa. . . The narrator travels to Europe, by crossing the meridian in the same way Achilles gets back. I go to Lisbon, Ireland, London and feel some kind of reversal, something in time is happening, new into old and old into new' (*CDW*, 174). Following this peripatetic line, we may

continue, for instance: 'I (my imagination) goes to the Dakotas, to another epic story of a people's struggle, the story of Catherine Weldon and the Ghost Dance of the Sioux, which I shall also treat separately in my play *The Ghost Dance*.'

The first four chapters introduce us to Achille and his circle of characters, and set in motion the action concerning his quarrel with Hector over Helen. Curiously, though, the strongest focus here is on Philoctete, a character peripheral to the ostensible main action. Walcott's interest in him is all the more significant when we consider that he is mentioned only once, in passing, in *The Iliad*. He adds to the sociological texture of *Omeros*, and his inability, because of the festering wound to his foot from a rusting anchor, to continue to ply the fisherman's calling with Achille and the others underscores how much that craft of dangerous struggle with the sea means to their sense of self-worth and manhood. Philoctete's wound turns out to be crucial to the poem's meaning, the central symbol, representing all the wounds, of one kind or other, which the poem comprehends. The hope of healing for all these afflictions, the recuperation of all outcasts, turns on the finding of a cure for Philoctete's wound. Jahan Ramazani has commented in illuminating detail on the significance of Philoctete and his wound.¹³

So Dennis Plunkett, to whom the poem's attention shifts, momentarily, in chapter v, is also one of the wounded, one who also, despite the colonialism which he represents, draws on our sympathy. A variant on Captain Luther Franklin of *Franklin*, and on Walcott's headmaster in *Another Life*, Plunkett is an Englishman who had been wounded in World War Two while fighting with General Montgomery, and who had ended up in St Lucia in search of a paradisaical place of healing. The poet-narrator declares, accepting responsibility for his work, 'This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character. / He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme / of this work, this fiction' (*O*, 28). Plunkett also bears the psychological wound of war, and Walcott vividly imagines the horror of Plunkett's seeing his comrades being maimed and killed beside him on the battlefield.

In addition, Plunkett is afflicted by the male desire for a son and heir, and therefore embodies one variant of the father-son theme which is also a major motif of the work. Smitten, like

everyone else, by Helen's beauty, he determines that she 'needed a history / ... / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war' (*O*, 30). This, of course, is allegorical; Helen is also St Lucia. So, with the zeal of the amateur historian, he throws himself into the research by which he will in effect enact the Eurocentric mythologizing of the island, bringing her into history as the prize fought over by European colonizing powers, England and France. Ironically, then, his project invests in the very sense of history that he seeks to put behind him in leaving Europe, in his quest for 'sunlit islands, / where what they called history could not happen' (*O*, 28).

A too-ready preoccupation with the Homeric features of the poem no doubt largely accounts for the fact that there has been scant attention to the extent to which Africa figures in it.¹⁴ If the poem brings to a head Walcott's long creative involvement with the classics, it is also his deepest, most unqualified acknowledgement to date of the African presence in the Caribbean. It is remarkable how often some detail, even in passing, is identified as African, and the connotations are always of the admirable. When Philoctete works in his yam garden, 'the wind turned the yam leaves like maps of Africa' (*O*, 20). Describing the coastal villages of the island, the narrator tells us that 'the deep-green crescents held African villages' (*O*, 57). The waves rolling west across the Atlantic are 'the long African combers' (*O*, 226). When Ma Kilman takes the bread at Mass, 'there was an old African / doubt that paused before taking the wafer's white leaf' (*O*, 58). The beauty of Helen, never mind her European shadow, is a refiguring of the girl who was 'The Light of the World'. She has an African authority, 'the carved lids of the unimaginable / ebony mask' (*O*, 24).

The central moment of the book is the sequence – chapters xxiv to xxx – in which Achille makes his time-conflating dream-vision voyage to Africa, retracing the Middle Passage. Where Makak's dream journey to Africa had been a necessary exorcism of a fantasy Africa, Achille's is a journey to source. He meets his African 'father' in his quest for himself: 'Then, for the first time, he asked himself who he was' (*O*, 130). Where, thirty years earlier, in the heat of the moment, Walcott had spoken harshly against the declamatory Africanist vogue, which seemed to him misdirected, the product of a 'rage for revenge', now he affirms the African in the strength and

beauty of the St Lucian folk. Speaking, yet again, through his dead father's voice, of the women who loaded coal into ships in Castries harbour, he says:

The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex.
Instead, they were darker and stronger, and their gait
was made beautiful by balance. . . (*O*, 74)

The recuperation of Africa in Caribbean consciousness is manifest in another crucial quest, Ma Kilman's journey into the forest to find the lost African root that will heal Philoctete's wound. Where Walcott once foregrounded what was lost in the Middle Passage, he now affirms what survived, the creativity, the strength to endure, the sense of connection, however submerged, with the old gods:

The chained wrists couldn't forget
the carver for whom antelopes leapt, or
the bow-maker the shaft, or the armourer
his nail-studs. . . (*O*, 150)

To have survived the Middle Passage, and to have forged a people out of the dispersal, that was the true epic: 'But they crossed, they survived. There is the epical splendour' (*O*, 149). *Omeros* reaffirms and extends the consciousness of 'The Almond Trees'.

Any segment will illustrate well enough the narrative strategies of the poem and how they work to deploy meaning. I choose one episode, from Book Six: Ma Kilman effecting the cure of Philoctete's wound. Book Six falls into two sections, the first, chapters XLIV to XLIX, taking up again the story of Achille, Helen, Hector, Ma Kilman and Philoctete. The main events are the death and burial of Hector and Ma Kilman's healing of Philoctete's wound. The second segment, chapters L to LIV, continues the story of the Plunketts, the main event here being Maud's death.

The abrupt cut from one segment to the other is typical of the non-schematic but artful structure of the narrative. The two segments, the two plots are linked by and in the consciousness of the poet-narrator, not only in the sense that they are both parts of his overall design for them as their creator, but more specifically in that he is himself a character in his fiction, one on whose life their lives impinge. So Book Six begins in the lyric voice of the poet-narrator

reconnecting with the Antilles, coming home. In Book Five he and his imagination had been roaming, from Lisbon to London to the Ireland of Maud Plunkett and James Joyce, to Istanbul, to Canada, to Boston (where he was living at the time) and Catherine Weldon, about whom he had written his play *The Ghost Dance*. Book Five ended with a dream-like drawing together of Catherine, the narrator and Omeros, in a question-marked closure.

The focus then shifts, in Book Six, to St Lucia, to which the narrator returns, first, in a smooth segue, by way of sensuous memories of the island in January with the Christmas breeze blowing. He actually arrives in chapter LV, to the news that Hector has died. Hurling along, daredevil, in his 'transport', the 'Comet', along the narrow, winding hill road, he swerved to avoid a piglet and crashed.

Chapter XLVI, section i, recounts the burial of Hector. The simple observances of his friends take on a solemn, ritualistic dignity, and a heroic code is enacted when Achille grieves for the one who had become his antagonist, honouring him as a hero. Section iii brings this Hector-and-Achille segment to a kind of closure with an evocation of the natural environment and the joy of honest labour in it. Achille, labouring in his garden of the sea, is paralleled by Philoctete working his garden on the mountainside. But at the end of the action, Philoctete, like an outcast, cries out at the pain of his wound as he dresses it with 'hot sulphur' (O, 235) and Vaseline ointment.

So chapters XLVII to XLIX narrate the events that constitute a climax and resolution: Ma Kilman's finding and administering the cure for Philoctete's wound and the beneficent results of this action. This narrative blends realism and myth. Ma Kilman goes alone into the forest, up the mountain, to find the secret root or herb with the curative power. She is driven by her desire to help Philoctete, and by her tribal, atavistic memory of such a root. But there is also a sense that she is drawn by a will greater than herself. Nature and centuries have been preparing the event. The root has been waiting for Ma Kilman to find it. The seed of the healing plant had been brought across the Atlantic from Africa and dropped in the forest by an African swift.

Ma Kilman's is a shamanistic quest, rehearsing the myth of journey and return. Like all such quests, it is an ordeal: to find the plant, she must pass cactus and thorn trees (O, 238). The 'path / led

through nettles to the cure' (*O*, 237). The stages of her journey represent a metamorphic progression that involves the African-European interface in Caribbean culture. She goes at first, not into the forest, but to five o'clock mass. She is realistically and endearingly characterized: a large woman in her Sunday best – black dress, black hat trimmed with imitation red berries, purse tightly clutched, stockings held up by elastic bands around her swollen legs, an uncomfortable, ill-fitting wig – a woman we might see walking to church any Sunday morning on any West Indian island.

A magical dimension to this realism is figured by the line of black ants which follow and guide her from the church to the plant at the foot of a cedar, 'signalling a language she could not recognize' (*O*, 238). '[T]alking the language of her great-grandmother, / the gossip of a distant [African] market' (*O*, 244), the ants represent all the generations of her forebears and their labour, the slave coffles, the lines of female coal-carriers, hardly better than slaves, who had been described in chapter 5 of *Another Life*.

Rolling down the elastic bands to ease the discomfort of the stockings as she prays, Ma Kilman is reminded of Philoctete's discomfort. Her empathy is a sign that her redemptive quest is undertaken not for herself but for her people. She must immerse herself in their pain in order to administer the cure. Significantly, therefore, the plant that she seeks gives off a stench like that from Philoctete's wound, but Ma Kilman must not flinch from it. Nature itself empathizes with the human wound that it must heal.

A transformation begins as Ma Kilman, numbering her rosary beads, finds herself reciting 'her own litany of berries' (*O*, 236), the names and curative properties of the forest plants, re-collecting potent folk memory. She goes back behind and beyond Christianity to reaffirm the suppressed or half-forgotten African gods, 'the unburied gods', 'waiting to be known by name; but she / had never learnt them, though their sounds were within her, / subdued in the rivers of her blood' (*O*, 242). This movement of recuperation is not motivated by any sense of hostility or revenge. There is no rancour in her towards 'her Lord, / or that golden host named for her mother, Mary' (*O*, 242). It is the poet-narrator who observes sarcastically that 'the priests considered evil / in their white satin frocks' 'the obeah that possessed her' (*O*, 245).

At the climax of the quest, Ma Kilman does ritual penance and prayer. The freeing of her mind to be open to possession by the ancestral African gods is symbolized by her divesting herself of the hat 'with its false beads' and 'the henna wig' (*O*, 243), and the unbuttoning of 'her church dress' (244). As she howls in the harrowing of spirit possession, her gesture projects the archetype of death and rebirth:

her arms ululated, uplifting the branches
of a tree carried across the Atlantic that shoots
fresh leaves as its dead trunk wallows on our beaches. (*O*, 243)

As Ma Kilman makes her measured return down the mountain, back into the village, the poet-narrator identifies himself as also being her beneficiary and her spiritual son: 'See her there, my mother, my grandmother, my great-great- / grandmother.' 'There was no difference / between me and Philoctete' (*O*, 245).

Ma Kilman, in chapter XLIX, having earned the power and authority to do so, administers the ritual, lustral bush bath to Philoctete. Its wider communal-historical significance is graphically imaged in the fact that the makeshift bathtub is a long-abandoned vat in which sugar was boiled on the slave plantation. To use it now as the cauldron for healing the wound of centuries is a creative act of appropriation and reversal. Section ii of chapter XLIX records the results of the cure: self-knowledge ('the yoke of the wrong name slipped from his shoulders' (*O*, 247)); psychological freedom, by implication for his people in general ('the white foam unlocked her coffles' (*O*, 247)), including freedom from self-contempt; and even the recovery of warriorhood – 'The bow leapt back to the palm of the warrior' (*O*, 247). The ultimate result of the cure is that it also heals the poet-narrator, and closes, at least for this moment, the wound that is the gap between him and the poor. It is as if the storyteller himself is being healed by his story. In the intensity of the moment, he relives the time 'when he'd weep in the window for their tribal shame' (*O*, 248), when he was first seized by the 'ambition' 'to share their lives' (*WTS*, 20). Now, for this moment at least, through the poetic imagination, the ambition is realized, and the Achille–Ma Kilman segment of Book Six closes with the poet's lyric elation at his own heart-cleansing, at the clarity and rightness of his love for the island, figured in the homeliest details of its life and the lives of its people.

In the penultimate chapter of Book Six the poet-narrator confronts himself with the question which the reader may already have been wanting to ask Walcott, and which Walcott, characteristically, finesses: when would he get beyond seeing everything in terms of the classics, beyond what he 'had read and rewritten till literature / was guilty as History' (*O*, 271). 'Why not see Helen / as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow' (*O*, 271)? When would he get beyond 'All that Greek manure under the green bananas' (*O*, 271)? There is a kind of answer here, in the paradoxical double pun in 'manure' and 'green'. From one point of view, the classics are only so much faeces cluttering the earth around the roots of a fresh, green culture. At the same time, 'manure' is nourishment, contributing to the growth of a young, green culture. Walcott's indulgence of the classics is very self-aware. He knows that his material is his 'to make what [he] wanted of it, or / what [he] thought was wanted' (the self-scrutiny again) (*O*, 272).

After these conflicted musings, chapter LV, with a striking shift of mood, brings Book Six and the year of Maud's and Hector's death to a festive close. The chapter records the communal joy of a St Lucian Christmas and is devoted mainly to a traditional folk masquerade, a creolized African retention. The dancers, Achille and Philoctete, accompanied by fife, chac-chac and drum, dressed in 'drag', play women-warriors. The androgyny, the balancing of the male and female principles, may well be a feature of whatever African world-view generates the masquerade. The comic is subsumed in the serious. The passion with which Achille and Philoctete dance is driven by and exorcizes the tribal memory of pain, the pain of the Middle Passage. We are far from the unknowing, compensatory fantasy imputed to the Carnival revellers in 'Mass Man' (*CP*, 99). This dance, too, signals a rebirth, because it is the first time that Achille and Philoctete have been able to perform it since Philoctete acquired the wound. As he dances, he relives and relieves his pain. At the end of the dance, released, he weeps, a full man.

'THE ODYSSEY: A STAGE VERSION'

A distinguishing feature of *Omeros* is that the Homeric presence is perhaps more pervasively inscribed, if more subsumed, in resonances from *The Odyssey* than from *The Iliad*, even if Walcott's poem

more immediately brings the latter to mind. An informing motif is the wanderer, the quester, whose wandering is all the more compelling in view of his fixation on home. Wanderers appear in multiple personas in *Omeros*. The poet-narrator is himself the arch-wanderer, compelled by his wandering, but moved by a deep, problematic attachment to home. This dramatic tension is one meaning that may be read into the statement which sums up the dilemma of the protagonist of the Odyssean lyric 'Sea Grapes': 'the ancient war between obsession and responsibility / will never finish' (*CP*, 297).¹⁵ In *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*, Odysseus accepts the image by which he has come to be defined, when he says of himself, 'He's turned into a name, wandering the wide seas' (*OSV*, 130). At the same time, if the story, as in Homer, is one about a wife who waited for her husband's return with a seemingly improbable fixity of love and duty, it is also the story, the simple story of a man bent on going home to his wife.

Furthermore, Odysseus is the classical figure that has been most persistent and definitive in Walcott's poetry, and it has long been a commonplace for critics to describe his poetic development as an odyssey. Homer's Odysseus, mediated by Dante, Joyce and other masters, has voyaged through *Epitaph for the Young*, for instance, in *Another Life* and in 'The Schooner *Flight*'. So, in a way, it was the most inevitable of coincidences that Walcott should have been invited to dramatize *The Odyssey*, an undertaking which was itself a kind of homecoming.

If the image of Odysseus as the archetypal voyager holds particular appeal for Walcott, the play also constructs Odysseus in another image particularly appealing to Walcott. Eumaeus, Odysseus' faithful swineherd, in his grassroots wisdom and shrewd judgement of men, describes Odysseus as 'A natural man' (*OSV*, 116). At this point, Eumaeus does not know that it is Odysseus to whom he is speaking. His evaluation, so unqualifiedly voiced to an apparent stranger, must no doubt have been especially pleasing to the Odysseus whom we have come to know in the play by this point. An epic hero, yes, of outstanding ability – as when he alone is able to string the great bow and shoot the arrow through the tunnel of axes and cut down the throng of suitors – but not projected as a superman. He has earned his distinction and the protection of

Providence through hard experience and the capacity of the natural man to endure and to resist the onslaught of Poseidon. We are reminded from time to time that he is a king, but he never pulls rank.

In adapting *The Odyssey* to the stage, then, Walcott naturalizes and demystifies Homer, and writes a play for his time, one which nevertheless stays substantially close to Homer. The first challenge was to recast Homer's long, ample, unhurried narrative into the 'two hours traffic' of the stage. It also entailed, as we should expect of Walcott, using the medium of verse and exploiting the narrative, storytelling possibilities. Comparison with the original sharpens appreciation of how well Walcott has achieved these objectives. A few examples will suffice.¹⁶

While following clearly enough the outline of Homer's story, Walcott's version does its own thing, so to speak, with its insertions, omissions, emphases and overall shape. For instance, his opening scene is for all practical purposes his own invention. In the final chapter of *The Odyssey*, the ghost of Agamemnon, in Hades, gives the ghost of Achilles an account of Achilles' funeral on the plains of Troy before the Greeks set sail for home. The episode turns the spotlight momentarily on the mighty Achilles, and reinforces the ambience of heroism in which Odysseus has his place. Walcott, taking his cue from this episode, a postscript as it were, begins his play with his version of the scene at Achilles' funeral. This manoeuvre provides valuable exposition for the action that is to come, especially for a modern audience that may not be all that familiar with Homer's poem. Walcott's scene, despite the fact that it shows the homage of the Greek warriors to their slain first-among-heroes, Achilles, works to focus attention on Odysseus, to bring him and his character immediately before us. The scene establishes Odysseus' longing for home, against which the obstacles he will encounter on his journey will loom in that much sharper relief. In addition, Odysseus' longing and determination are enacted prior to our being shown Penelope and Telemachus and *their* longing to see Odysseus, which is what is shown first by Homer.

While Agamemnon's account of the funeral is elevated and solemn, a fitting tribute to a hero-king, Walcott gives us 'natural' men, individualistic, with their foibles, bantering, arguing over the spoils of war. After the squabble with Odysseus over which of them

should get Achilles' shield, Ajax says to Odysseus, 'Bear it, you turtle! Take ten years to reach your coast' (*OSV*, 4). This injunction is not only an unwitting prophecy, telling the audience the time span which the rest of the play will cover, but it also introduces the image of the turtle that will playfully attach to Odysseus throughout the action. The image cuts him down to size, so to speak, but by the same token signifies his worthiness – a little man, not glamorous, dwarfed by the great shield, but a tough little man, street-smart, of great heart and endurance, willing to take everything that Poseidon throws at him.

The play's general vivacity and variety of characterization are enhanced by the deftly sketched portraits of lesser characters such as Eurycleia and Eumaeus, versions of the wise and faithful, but not servile servant, somewhat reminiscent of George of *The Last Carnival* and Cook of *Franklin*. Walcott makes a point of highlighting both in the first scene at Odysseus' palace (Act One, Scene 2), a shrewd strategy for the dramatic effect and aesthetic shape of the play, since both characters, as in Homer, are to figure prominently at the end of the play, in the recognition (in both senses) of Odysseus on his return home.

Outstanding adaptations that contribute to the modernizing of Walcott's version are his treatment of the Circe/Calypso and Cyclops episodes. Cyclops becomes 'Big Brother', a prototypical modern dictator-tyrant, yet another object of Walcott's contempt for political tyrannies. His conflation of Circe and Calypso is a case of creative economy, presenting their/her seduction of Odysseus as a Carnival/Shango ritual and mask, a 'bacchanal' in the terminology of Trinidadian Carnival. Taking advantage of the name Calypso, Walcott makes Circe into a beautiful and spellbinding Carnival queen, a 'bacchanal lady'. It is as if a Carnival band is playing both a Circe mas' (mask) and a Shango mas'. This strategy is a good example of Walcott's exploiting the story's potential for magical spectacle and for drawing on popular cultural performance. Here and in other aspects (e.g. the frequent use of disguise) the play realizes the theatrical, playful possibilities of role-playing.

Walcott's treatment of the Circe/Calypso adventure, like aspects of his characterization of Penelope, also projects a modern, comparatively enlightened gender consciousness, which has been given

due attention by Paula Burnett.¹⁷ Circe's cave/tent (to use Carnival imagery) is also a brothel. She explains that female prostitution is the projection and fulfilment of male desire. Odysseus himself says that 'she knows. . . that brothels aren't just sailors' dreams, but all men's' (*OSV*, 77). So the rutting swine into which Odysseus' men are changed represent their own lasciviousness, and 'what they become is for what their natures yearned' (*OSV*, 76).

One might note, too, Walcott's treatment of the figure of Elpenor, Odysseus' young helmsman. In Homer, we first see Elpenor when he falls to his death from the roof of Circe's palace, when Odysseus rouses his men in the early morning to set sail from Circe's island. Elpenor had been sleeping off a drunken stupor and, in his confused state, suddenly awakened, he lost his balance and fell. Walcott repositions and rewrites Elpenor's death. He introduces Elpenor in the first scene (Act One, Scene 5) in which Odysseus appears en route. He makes Elpenor drown¹⁸ as a result of being swept overboard when Odysseus' low-minded crew, driven by envious acquisitiveness, attempt to steal what they imagined to be booty given him in a bag by King Aeolus. Walcott uses Elpenor to sustain the theme of the father's quest for his son and, by implication, the obverse. Asking Elpenor his age, Odysseus, on hearing the reply, exclaims, 'Twenty-two! My son's age. Or, rather, half a son.' 'His other half could be you' (*OSV*, 39). Since Odysseus is to meet Elpenor again, on his visit to Hades (Act One, Scene 14), it is dramatically useful for Walcott to establish early Elpenor's presence and misfortune as part of the weight which Odysseus carries in his memory.

The idea of a self-delighting artifice of theatrical playfulness manipulated to the end of serious meaning is also realized in Walcott's introduction of a narrator, Billy Blue, a blind blues singer. Billy Blue has a parallel in *Omeros*' St Omere, nicknamed Seven Seas, the old, blind fisherman-cum-village bard. The blues singer, being by vocation a performer, brings with him the sense of a theatre in which the audience participates. His blindness not only suggests that he is an alter ego of Homer himself, but also facilitates Billy Blue's assuming, as convenient, the guise of Homer's bards Phemius and Demodocus, who appear in *The Odyssey*. Embodying the play's playful mix of cultural traditions and historical periods, Billy Blue

also functions like the Greek chorus, variously narrator, commentator and participant in the action.

Billy Blue's African American English, like Eurycleia's West Indian, adds to the variety of cultural voices and linguistic registers that particularizes characters and enlivens the play. Billy Blue, Eurycleia and Circe/Calypso are a vibrant black presence in the play. It is not so much a matter of Caribbeanizing Homer as of affirming the black presence in a modern, globalized world, and dramatizing an *Odyssey* that is all men's and a Homer who is indeed the Homer of the seven seas (cf. Seven Seas in *Omeros*). The language of characters like Billy Blue and Eurycleia does not aim at strict verisimilitude. Its rather knowingly macaronic quality, and that of the play as a whole, suggests that the dramatist expects his audience to conspire playfully with him in a sophisticated theatrical artifice. Eurycleia at one moment sounds like a Jamaican ('Hodysseus', 'lickle', 'Them too civilize' (*OSV*, 8)), at another like a Trinidadian ('They go spew' (*OSV*, 10)), but, further, the servant who naturally uses either of those forms would hardly say, as she does, 'A hundred years jostling to nose his mother's trough' (*OSV*, 10)). What is more, as an Egyptian, and living in Ithaca at that, she would hardly speak either Jamaican or Trinidadian, but that she does is Walcott's playfully serious point.

Walcott's pacing of his action, the lively forward thrust of his narrative, is achieved in large measure by his choice and adroit handling of verse form. The verse, of a certain amplitude and sustained pattern, heightens the sound and propulsive energy of the dialogue, even while the language is kept largely conversational, not orotund or declamatory. Walcott uses here again the long, flexible line of *Omeros*, the 'rough hexameter' (or perhaps 'rough alexandrine'), but the stitching this time is not a 'rough terza rima' but an unobtrusive quatrain, rhymed as inventively and unemphatically as the rhyme of *Omeros*. The long line is on rare occasions rested or varied strategically, as in the brusque, thrust-and-parry exchange between Cyclops and Odysseus, and in Billy Blue's calypso-style narration in the Circe episode.

Most remarkable, though, is that the dialogue consists almost entirely of speeches no more than one line long, and often with two or more separate speeches constituting one line of verse. In

artistically appropriate contrast to this pattern are Billy Blue's narrator's songs, which link scenes. These are usually sonnets or extended sonnets, but unobtrusively so, since their rhyme is continuous with the rhyme pattern of the play as a whole. Walcott's drastic departure from the long speeches in Homer is a definitive factor, not only in the dramatization of the poem, but also in the forward thrust of the narrative. In the scene at Alcinous' palace, Walcott has the courtiers praise the art of Phemius'/Homer's storytelling:

THIRD COURTIER As blind as he is, he'll stitch them [his lines] into one song.

FIRST COURTIER His lines can hum like a succession of arrows.

SECOND COURTIER Or combers that crest from the shale, horizon-long.

FIRST COURTIER They are like huge oars lifting, the heft of his lines.

THIRD COURTIER Thudding like lances on the heart of this earth.

(OSV, 54)

This exchange also describes the movement of Walcott's play, the lines and the narrative, in which the dominant sound is the 'hum like a succession of arrows'. When the method is used to convey a typically Walcottian humour, self-reflexive, self-deflatingly aware of the temptation of 'high' style, the result can be crisp and infectious, as in the exchange between Odysseus and Nausicaa when she finds him washed up on the beach, an exchange which is a variation on that between Tisbea and Don Juan, on a similar occasion, in *The Joker of Seville*. At the same time, Walcott will judiciously make his long lines thud like lances and lift like huge oars, as when Odysseus declares himself to the suitors as he is about to destroy them.

Notwithstanding the excitement of Odysseus' adventures, the play consistently reminds us that his heart's compass is set to Ithaca. The highest drama is to be in the scenes of his return. Walcott exploits the dramatic potential of the return by focussing cleanly on the successive scenes of recognition and their functionality in the tension and build-up to Odysseus' routing of the suitors. Walcott plays upon the possibilities of dramatic irony that these scenes allow, given that at each stage the audience can appreciate the fact that Odysseus' interlocutors are usually unaware that it is Odysseus to whom they are speaking, and usually about Odysseus. The drama of the various recognition scenes is also enhanced by such distinctiveness

of characterization as Walcott adds to the various figures. An appreciable factor in this regard is humour, including Odysseus' 'corny' puns and verbal whimsy ('metaphors'/'met her first' (OSV, 124); 'Odysseusized' (OSV, 141)).

The scene between Eurycleia and Odysseus (Act Two, Scene 5) illustrates some of the ways in which Walcott brings something different to Homer's narrative. In Homer (*Odyssey*, chapter XIV), after her conversation with the stranger-beggar who is Odysseus in disguise, Penelope offers him hospitality, saying that her maids will wash his feet and spread a bed for him. Walcott contrives to get the full effect from Eurycleia's ecstatic shock when she realizes that it is Odysseus whose feet she is washing. What is more, Walcott's Eurycleia, manifesting class prejudice, considers it beneath her dignity to wash the dirty feet of a beggar, and voices her feelings in vivid Caribbean creole: 'Lord, missis, me must wash this man foot?' (OSV, 136). The irony of this situation and the factor of conflict enhance the climactic moment when Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus. Homer tells us, in a matter-of-fact way, that Eurycleia recognized Odysseus' scar as soon as she began to wash his feet. In Walcott, the recognition is dramatized with an absolute economy, which omits, for instance, the long digression by which Homer recounts how Odysseus had come by the scar. Her exclamation, as she collapses in shock ('Oh God, is you, Master?' (OSV, 137)), will have the optimal dramatic effect, including the audience's sympathetic chuckle.

At the end of Homer's poem, the image of Odysseus which stands out is that of the terrifying wielder of arms. Some of the kinsmen of the slain suitors move to attack Odysseus in revenge. But when Athena checks their ill-considered action, and they turn to flee, the 'indomitable Odysseus raised a terrible war-cry, gathered himself together and pounced on them like a swooping eagle'.¹⁹ However, at the command of Zeus, Athena makes Odysseus happily desist, whereupon she makes peace between the warring factions. Walcott foregoes this and all of Homer's final chapter, to keep the climax and resolution of the play sharply focussed on the routing of the suitors and the joyful reunion between man and wife. The play ends with Billy Blue's hushed, reverential celebration of the triumph of love, faith and endurance, and the peace of the sea-tossed 'heart in its harbour' (OSV, 158).

'THE BOUNTY'

The dominant mood and idea of *The Bounty*, thanksgiving for the bounty of life, is set in the title poem, which opens the volume, and which is an elegy for Alix Walcott, the poet's mother, who died in May 1990. It completes, in effect, a trilogy for his mother, which spans thirty-five years or so, beginning with chapter 2 of *Another Life*, followed by chapter xxxii of *Omeros*. In 'The Bounty,' the poet's consolation against her death is simply the blessing of life. He gives thanks for 'the light's bounty in familiar things' (B, 16), for the thrust of life in the least of God's creatures – ant, firefly, cricket, beetle, toad – for the bounty of the lowly breadfruit, 'slave food' (B, 3), brought to the Caribbean by Captain Bligh in his ship 'The Bounty'. He sings 'the bounty [of the sun] that returns each daybreak' (B, 4), and poem '23' ends in wonder at 'the way the sea shines in the sun, / silver and bountiful in the slow afternoon' (B, 56).

As we have seen, this theme is not new in Walcott. In the early poems it was a function of the exhilaration and promise of youth. It was sounded in *Sea Grapes* (1976), deepened by middle age's intimations of mortality. There are poems in *The Bounty* that awaken echoes of *Sea Grapes*. For instance, the 'one light' that illuminates the end of '34', and which 'still shines on a spire or conch shell' (B, 75), is the same light that 'flash[ed]' equally 'from doormen's buttons' (SG, 77) on a busy London street as on 'the rocks / around Balandra' (SG, 78) in a remote corner of Trinidad. And when, in *The Bounty*, in '22', Walcott says, 'I am considering a syntax the colour of slate', and that 'grey days are useful' (B, 55), we recall the grateful praise of grey in *Sea Grapes*, in 'Winding Up' and 'To Return to the Trees'.

In 'The Bounty', a sequence of seven sections in the same stanza pattern, the opening section is a prelude, rather weighed down at the very beginning with literary allusions. It is, appropriately, a dawn poem. The plants and small creatures praise life simply by going about their wonted business, and the poem, like them, cannot escape life's compulsion, like 'the bounty [of the sun, which] returns each daybreak' (B, 4), to the poet's wonderment. The recognition is of what Seamus Heaney, writing on John Clare, calls 'the awful

necessity of the gift for keeping going and the lovely wonder that it can be maintained'.²⁰ The poet's mother, we are told, lies in a cemetery by the beach. The phrase 'my mother lies' occurs twice in the opening poem, and the image will also begin section ii. However, over against her supine, static posture are all the great, small movements of nature, including the lines of the poem. Art itself, then, is a kind of nature.

The sun returns not only to the poet's wonderment, but also to (or for) his 'betrayal' (*B*, 4). Just as, in *Another Life*, Walcott had noted how 'the hand [which the young poet/lover] held already had betrayed / them by its longing for describing her' (*CP*, 236), so in 'The Bounty' he worries: 'I watch these lines grow and the art of poetry harden me / into sorrow as measured as this, to draw the veiled figure / of Mamma entering the standard elegiac' (*B*, 5). At the same time, he knows that the 'hardening' effect of art saves one from being maddened by grief, as John Clare went mad, 'who wept for a beetle's loss, for the weight / of the world in a bead of dew on clematis or vetch' (*B*, 5). Walcott goes so far as to say that he hates the poem he is writing as much as he loves the mother whose death has made him write it. This manoeuvre may be another version of the poet's dialogue with himself, this time about his ambivalence towards the very art to which he has given his life.

Section iii introduces another aspect of the poet's wrestling with himself as he seeks consolation. This has to do with Christian faith and doctrine. The poet is conscious of having, in a sense, betrayed the faith his mother had taught him when, in childhood, he 'believed in His Word, / in a widow's [his mother's] immaculate husband, in pews of brown wood' (*B*, 8). The idea is that he had revolted against this faith just as Fletcher Christian had revolted against Captain Bligh ('the God-captain is cast adrift / by a mutinous Christian' (*B*, 9)). But that is how the world turns: 'all these predictable passages that we first disobey / before we become what we challenged' (*B*, 10). And so, in spite of himself and the fact that his intellect tells him that he should never expect to see his mother again, 'there are inexplicable instincts that keep recurring / not from hope or fear only, that are real as stones' (*B*, 11); and so he 'felt something less than final at the edge of [her] grave' (*B*, 12).

In *The Bounty* the expression of thanksgiving for life's bounty is suffused with a quiet, retrospective, elegiac gravity that comes out of long experience of vicissitude, out of the roll-call of 'the names on the stones of the increasing dead' (B, 58). '14' is, as it were, the poet's anticipatory elegy for himself, in which, grateful for his life's labour, he is content that 'all [he] need[s] to do now at [his] age / and its coming serene extinction', is 'to pass, / praising the feathery swaying of the casuarinas / and those shuddering of thanks that so often descended' (B, 39). '30' is a prayer of thanks for domestic love in a quiet house that looks out on the sea. In '28' Walcott also gives thanks for that house, which is, 'in Yeats's phrase. . . "the bounty of Sweden"' (B, 61).²¹ In this poem Walcott once again finds sustaining correspondences between 'here' and 'elsewhere,' in an analogy between himself and Yeats in his late years. The poem ends:

No bounty is greater
than walking to the edge of the rocks where the headland's
detonations exult in their natural metre,
like white wings at Coole, the beat of his clapping swans. (B, 61)

The comforting thought of ending his days in his own little acre of home, near 'the expanding seaside city of graves' (B, 19), Choc cemetery, where his mother lies, is the focus of '1', which he ends with his own epitaph, "'Here lies / D.W. This place is good to die in"' (B, 19). In 'Spain', section iv, he imagines the day of his death as 'the day ahead, bountiful, abundant', and bequeaths his eyes and his ears, the portals of the imagination, in preparation for when the 'cloud-pages close in amen' (B, 44).

'Italian Eclogues', a sequence of six poems, is an elegy to his friend Brodsky, who had died the year before *The Bounty* was published, and whom Walcott had addressed in *Midsummer*, in which he referred to Brodsky in Rome writing his 'Roman Elegies' (and Brodsky had his eclogues also). 'Italian Eclogues' moves with a gentle heave of feeling, gracious and grateful for the bounty of friendship. At the end of 'v', the persona is 'lifted with grief and praise / so, that [his friend's] speck widens with elation, a dot that soars' (B, 68). Along the way, the sequence enters the grief of Brodsky's exile, the hostility of political systems to poetry and Brodsky's assiduous pursuit of his craft.

Anticipating *The Prodigal*, Walcott returns to the angst of homecoming in the sequence entitled 'Homecoming'. His sense of the intractable gap between his identification with home and the rankling sense of separation from it, the idea that he will never quite realize the childhood ambition to share the lives of the people, becomes a wound that he favours. This wound festers in the opening poem of the sequence 'Parang'. In 'Homecoming', after the first poem, which rekindles, as does 'Parang', section i, the fading memories of his 'country heart' (*B*, 31), of folk song, folk dance and folk festivals, 'like singers remembering the words / of a dying language' (*B*, 31), the sequence focusses sharply on the issue of language, extending the line of concern over the choice between English and French creole that runs through poems like 'Sainte Lucie' (*Sea Grapes*) and 'Cul de Sac Valley' (*The Arkansas Testament*). He is stung by a sense of betrayal at having left 'unuttered, undefined' by their native names the flora and fauna. He regrets, 'I hear a language receding, / unwritten by you, and the voices of children reading / your work in one language only when you had both' (*B*, 33). He ends declaring that his 'love of both [was] wide as the Atlantic is large' (*B*, 33), a fact that will not dispel the angst. In pieces like these, we see how poems that feature Walcott's characteristic questions of choice feed on a sense of the problematic and acknowledge the complexity of lived experience.

'Spain', a quartet, is an example of how Walcott imagines and enters countries distant in place and time through their art and literature, and through the correspondences that he finds between 'here' and 'elsewhere'. A poem-sequence like this is not so much about Spain as about the poet's grateful delight at the mind's capacity to make such connections. It is also about the intractability with which the imagination reconstructs nature as art, and how a landscape is 'uttered' and named by its art. So Spain is seen in terms of the work of Garcia Lorca, Antonio Machado and Francisco Goya, as well as the sculptor whose clay bull on the poet's 'kitchen lintel' connects with the 'real bulls' in 'our ochre pastures' (*B*, 41). He marvels at how the mind can quicken to

the blue distance of Spain from bougainvillea verandahs
 when white flowers sprout from the branches of a bull's horns,
 the white frangipani flowers like the white souls of nuns. (*B*, 43)

In the sequence 'Signs', we watch as, through a motif of cloud signs, nineteenth-century Europe, read through its art and literature as gracious and spacious, metamorphoses into a twentieth-century Europe of swastika, pogrom and holocaust. The ever-changing cloud image runs through the volume, a unifying, variously enabling metaphor-motif, sometimes signifying imagination itself.

Another area of Walcott's interest in the nature of poetry comes to the fore in the sequence 'Six Fictions', which pursues his fascination with the possibilities, within poetry, of interplay and cross-over between poetry and prose fiction. 'Six Fictions' refines the art of the short story as poem, not only by being narratives of consciousness and sensibility rather than event, but also by reflecting explicitly and self-reflexively on the constraints and challenges of narrative. He continues to resist fiction's demand for 'plot' and external 'action' – 'Pray for a life without plot, a day without narrative' (B, 49); 'they stretch, shudder, and are still, the only action / in their slowly swivelling eyes' (B, 51) – even while acknowledging the imperative with which any given seems to demand a consequence or sequel, how one thing leads to another in the imagination, until the symmetry of story, of beginning, middle and end is fulfilled. Further, there is a thin line between the fictive 'he'-protagonist and the lyric 'I'. The poet observes, 'I myself am a fiction' (B, 50), echoing the statement in *Omeros* that 'every "I" is a fiction / finally' (O, 28), which in turn harks back to *MS One*, where he had said: 'All autobiographies should be in the third person. . . Henceforth "I" should be known as "him"' (*MS One*, 9).²²

So, the imagined 'He' of 'Six Fictions' is really no more fictive than the 'I' of a poem like '23' ('I saw stones that shone with stoniness, I saw thorns / steady in their inimical patience' (B, 56)) or '26' ('The sublime always begins with the chord "And I saw," / following which apocalyptic cumuli curl and divide' (B, 59)). In these poems, as in others like '25', '27' and '28', the poet rehearses – with a deeper resonance than before, with a passion for life and nature that is confounded by the sense of mortality – his lifelong effort, a process without closure, to attune himself to the rhythms of nature, to emulate its seeming indifference with a passionate calm. '23', for example, works to the point where he can, with thanksgiving, 'foresee [himself] as blessedly invisible, / anonymous

and transparent as the wind, a leaf-light traveller / between branches and stones' (*B*, 56).

In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Walcott commented on *The Bounty*, with special reference to 'Italian Eclogues':

I don't want to forget anyone I loved, and I can't forget Joseph [Brodsky]. But what do you do about the reality of afternoon light on the sea and the absence of a friend? The thing you do is say you yourself will disappear; but you don't want anyone to stop enjoying that light: you can't leave that legacy to your children or those you love. So the book has the confrontation and acceptance and bafflement of death.²³

'27' is the praise poem that all the poems work towards. Again epiphanic, as the poet contemplates rain and grey clouds covering the landscape, 'mak[ing] every headland a ghost' (*B*, 60), it brings the transforming reminder 'that all substance thins into mist'. This ultimate insubstantial is a transcendence, a place 'where those we still love exist / but in another sense, that this shore cannot understand'. The statement 'those we still love exist' draws us to a simultaneous reordering of the words into 'those we love still exist', so that the full meaning is 'those we still love still exist'. There is a nice pun on 'sense', which also signifies that those we still love continue to exist in a being beyond accessibility to the mortal senses. This perception, of the ultimate insubstantiality of the sensuous substance of things, of nature, is all the more hard won in a poet who has so superbly represented that substance. So 'praise to the rain its hoarse voice dissolver of shapes, / of the peaks of power, princes, and mountain slopes' (*B*, 60).

'27' also illustrates well the overall style and sound quality of *The Bounty*, which are similar to those of *Midsummer*. Apart from the title poem, the book consists of sixty-seven short poems, each less than a page, and some grouped into sequences, e.g. 'Signs' or 'A Santa Cruz Quartet'. The poems range between eighteen and twenty-six lines each, all but four of them being between twenty and twenty-five. The lines are a sort of stretched-out, irregular iambic pentameter, usually of twelve syllables or more, arranged in a kind of loose terza rima. The style of the volume accommodates well the inflections of the natural speaking voice, without being too casual, for example: 'Remember childhood? Remember a faraway rain? / Yesterday I wrote a letter and tore it up' (*B*, 28).

The long lines and the frequent long periods convey a sense of the overflow of bounty, where the same form had been, in *Midsummer*, conducive to a seething, roiling, unstanchable flow. The twenty-five lines of '27' ('Praise to the rain') consist of just two sentences. The impression of a self-renewing wave is enhanced at the opening of the poem by the play of alliteration and assonance, and the repetition of 'praise' with its initial plosive. As the movement renews itself and the praise lifts, the ineluctable advance of the rain and its symbolic tenor, death, is underscored by the slowing down at the end of the third line with the juxtaposition of the two stressed, long-vowelled syllables of 'slow shroud', only for the movement to pick itself up again with 'she', which follows and alliterates with 'shroud'.

One may wonder, though, whether the sweeping, laden seine-draught of *The Bounty's* verse, tending to the magisterial, might not have been happily relieved by a more diaphanous style, given the avowal of the bounty of simple things, 'awe in the ordinary' (*B*, 7), the radiant insubstantial and the invoking of the transcendent simplicity of John Clare. Something of that translucency lights up '24', which memorializes a schoolmate of the poet's, Alphaeus Prince, who died young, 'loved for his beauty, his wit, his eyes', whose early death brought him a legendary distinction in the poet's view. The poet wonders why this long buried memory now springs to mind, among the recent dead whom *The Bounty* honours. The answer may be that here too there is the beneficent radiance of death, the death of a boy 'whose name still carries joy / in it, and who made death a gift we quietly envied'. The memory of the boy is inseparable from the fact that '[t]his morning the sea-wind / is fresh [and] the island shines in light' (*B*, 57).

'TIEPOLO'S HOUND'

Walcott's interest in the interplay of genres takes a new turn with *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000). This work fashions a biography with a difference, one which is in dialogue with autobiography, while the whole is a commodious, multi-faceted novel of sorts. Here again the poet substantially enters his fiction. Again there is self-awareness of the poem as fictive construct, as something purposively shaped, the idea that what might otherwise be seen as a mere departure from fact

is actually true to an imaginative imperative, that the truest maps are 'maps made in the heart' (*TH*, 147). *Tiepolo's Hound* is itself a map made in the heart. Again, the poem self-reflexively considers the nature of fiction, of poetry, and remarks 'fiction's treason, / to deny fact, alter topography to its own map' (*TH*, 102). Rationalizing his failure to establish definitively whether a painting in which he had seen, or thought he had seen, a white hound with a light-flashing thigh, was Tiepolo's or Veronese's, he concludes:

... what is crucial was not true ascription
to either hand – rather the consequence
of my astonishment, which has blent this fiction
to what is true without a change of tense. (*TH*, 133)

Walcott suggests that the painter and the poet are equally makers of fictions, and that fiction releases the 'vision' in matter-of-fact reality. For both it is a matter of '[t]hose little strokes whose syllables confirm / an altering reality for vision / on a blank page' (*TH*, 70). So Walcott says, 'I shift his biography as he shifted houses / in his landscapes' (*TH*, 70). For both painter and poet it is a matter 'not [of] walled facts, but their essences' (*TH*, 70).

Once again in the course of a long narrative poem, Walcott shows his inventiveness in 'refresh[ing] forms and stanzas' (*B*, 64), to borrow the phrase he used of Brodsky. The nice balance between pattern and flexibility depends partly on the discreet blending of couplet and quatrain. The lines are arranged in unrhymed couplets on the page, but each pair of couplets constitutes a quatrain, these quatrains once again marked by the poet's resourcefulness with rhyme.²⁴

There are two plots: the story of Camille Pissarro and the story of the poet's search to find again the painting in which he had seen the white hound. Around the latter swirls a variety of the poet's reflections on his own life and his views on life and art. The poem moves between the two stories in an arrestingly unpredictable manner, as if finding its way as it goes. The meaning of the whole is a function of how the two stories inform each other. Despite the differences between their origins and their situations in youth, Walcott reasonably constructs Pissarro as representing the dilemma of 'every island artist' (*TH*, 24): the difficult choice between the colonial's 'longing

for the centre' (*TH*, 24) and the guilty feeling of betrayal that goes with that longing. Pissarro is caught between two worlds: 'In which should I remain?' (*TH*, 25). However, although parallels between the two stories are the basis on which they are interwoven, none more so than the absolute commitment of both men to their art, differences between them also prove important.

To enter into the story of Pissarro is a strategically apt way by which Walcott may memorialize in verse his own life as a painter. *Tiepolo's Hound* is Walcott's homage to painting, even more than was *Another Life*. In the earlier poem, trying to explain his apparent failure as a painter, he wrote that he had 'hoped that both disciplines [painting and poetry] might / by painful accretion cohere / and finally ignite'. However, he 'lived in a different gift, / its element metaphor' (*CP*, 200). A hope impossible to realize, no doubt, but *Another Life* is itself distinguished by its painterly evocations and its homage to the masters whose paintings, with the guidance of Harold Simmons, he studied. *Tiepolo's Hound* takes this achievement further. One can hardly imagine anything in poetry that more closely, more sustainedly approaches the cohering of the two disciplines. At one and the same time the poet represents in words the life in paintings, or, more precisely, the life of paint, and life as painting, 'flesh becoming paint' (*TH*, 108), the identification of 'brushstroke and word' (*TH*, 99). What is more, metaphor enriches the texture of these verbal brush strokes, without diminishing the exactness of representation. The idea of the cohering of the two disciplines is furthered by the inclusion, in the hardcover edition of the poem, of full-colour reproductions of twenty-six of Walcott's own paintings. They are there not as illustrations, but in their own right, interfacing with the poem.²⁵

The opening chapter is a prelude to the whole. Its four sections constitute a collage, signalling variously the main lines of narrative and theme. Section 1 introduces the Pissarro story. 'Young Camille Pissarro' (*TH*, 4) strolls with his family down a street in Charlotte Amalie, capital of St Thomas in what was then the Danish Virgin Islands. Walcott evokes the peace and somnolence of a tropical, small-island Sunday afternoon (cf. 'Sabbaths, W.I.' (*CP*, 362)), with the hymn singing of 'Mission slaves' borne on a 'salt breeze' (*TH*, 3), and 'the Synagogue of Blessing and Peace and Loving Deeds', where

the Pissarros worshipped, 'shut for this Sabbath' (*TH*, 4). The otherwise innocently descriptive 'salt' is poignant with the suffering of both the African and the Jewish diasporas. The Pissarros were Sephardic Jews, who, fleeing the Inquisition, had settled in St Thomas. There is also the related theme of migration, from outpost to centre, from the Caribbean to Europe. As the Pissarros stroll by the harbour, a mail boat is putting to sea, and 'they feel their bodies leaving / the gliding island' (*TH*, 4). This prefigures Camille's eventual departure, first for Venezuela and then for France.

There is also a black mongrel, now following the strollers nervously, now 'cower[ing] through a park railing' (*TH*, 4), and which, at first reading, one might easily take for granted as a mere detail of descriptive verisimilitude. However, it will reappear at intervals in the poem, in crucial counterpoint to the epiphanic white hound. The black mongrel is the Other, the shadow without which the white hound does not exist.

In section 2 of chapter 1, Walcott sets up a 'home' locale from his own story. He describes a Sunday afternoon in Port of Spain, which roughly mirrors the Sunday afternoon in Charlotte Amalie described in section 1. Here too we overhear the singing of a black congregation, and the poet recalls that there was once a synagogue in Port of Spain. This too is a scene of stillness and peace, but now the repeated stress on 'the city's emptiness' (*TH*, 5) is complicated by ambivalence. 'Emptiness' not only underscores and hallows the quiet – 'a silent city, blest with emptiness', and 'empty back yards with calm breadfruit leaves' (*TH*, 5) – but also suggests stagnation and non-achievement, a situation from which the aspiring young artist might feel a need to escape. The image of a boat putting out from the island links with the idea of the diasporas that went into the making of the Caribbean, implicit in the references to Asia and Guinea, which in turn recalls the Exodus of section 1.

Before returning to the Pissarro story, Walcott introduces the plot of his own story, thereby suggesting that it is through the lens of his own story that he will be 'reading' Pissarro. *Another Life* had told how life had truly begun for the young Walcott when he 'fell in love with art' (*CP*, 186) as he studied reproductions of masterpieces in Thomas Craven's *Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, his first museum as it

were. Now, in section 3 of chapter I, he recounts how his love was deepened on his first visits to actual museums. He remembers the moment when, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he 'felt [his] heart halt' as he 'caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh / of a white hound entering the cave of a table, / so exact in its lucency at *The Feast of Levi*' (TH, 7). However, he was never able to find again the particular 'hound in astounding light' (TH, 8). Seeming at first certain that it was in Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi*, he becomes increasingly unsure as to whether the painting he remembered was Veronese's or Tiepolo's. His obsessive quest to recover the hound will become the leitmotif of his personal narrative.

The uncertainty about the hound, the blurring of memory, leads to section 4 of chapter I, with its theme of transience, death, the impossibility of saving our moments of illumination from the flux of things. In chapters II and III Walcott goes back to his youth to tell how his first models were reproductions of European paintings, because those were all he had to go by. However, in their devoted apprenticeship to paintings 'so far from [the] life fermenting around us' (TH, 14), were his father and himself guilty of 'despis[ing] the roots / and roofs of [their] island as inferior shapes' (TH, 13)? There is no easy answer. A counter-voice in the poet remarks the miraculous possibility of absorption of those foreign models, the fact that there is a faith of art which transcends one's identification with any particular geography. The imagination can contain, by the one faith, 'the carnival lances of Uccello's pawing horses' and 'the chivalric panoply of tossing green bananas' (TH, 14).

Chapter III takes us to the poet's admiring, elated discovery of the Impressionists, thereby preparing the reader for the Pissarro story. Evoking Impressionist Paris, he begins a brief history of Impressionism and an exposition of its principles. Here too the idea of 'the faiths that made all one' (TH, 14) is enacted, as he takes us on a quick Impressionist tour of his island, its villages with their French names. Then, repeating the story told in *Another Life*, he says that his 'pen replaced a brush' (TH, 19). While this means literally that he gave up painting for poetry, it also, ironically, suggests the idea of the identification, the inter-changeability of pen and brush.

Chapter IV picks up, abruptly, the Pissarro story, which will occupy the body of the poem until the end of chapter XIII. The

narrative begins with a brief outline of the family history, told in the form of a letter from Camille's grandfather, which ends with an injunction to the young man to 'follow the [family] business, not turn into a painter' (*TH*, 22). This charge indicates the first of the various conflicts that will energize the plot, because it is a direct obstacle and provocation to young Pissarro's artistic talent and ambition and to his increasing desire to leave the island for the art centre of Europe. This desire provokes in turn another conflict, that between the compulsion to leave and the sense that the island, confining though it was, offered its own excitement to his artistic gift, the challenge to record, for instance, 'the wet light moving down the ebony fissure / of a fisherman's shoulders' (*TH*, 23). Still, he had to leave; 'he had no more choice than the ship that steered / with its black chimneys and volcanic fires' (*TH*, 29). The chimney and the fires, signifying the turbulence of the ship's engine, symbolize the inner turmoil and passionate drive of the young Pissarro. At the end of chapter v, having returned from Venezuela, he eventually leaves for Paris.

Book Two depicts Pissarro's life in France and how he became an important part of the avant-garde art movement. Pissarro's story is one of achievement, but also one of hardship and deprivation. The inner conflict he has brought with him from St Thomas continues, and is deepened by other conflicts. For instance, he is creatively excited by the masterpieces of painting all around him, yet at the same time he feels intimidated and excluded by the culture they represent: 'Museums demean him. Island boy' (*TH*, 35). In addition to the self-doubt and the sense of being alienated from the French and metropolitan landscape and culture, there is also the sense of alienation attaching to the fact that he is a Jew, and, most hurtful of all, the misunderstanding and rejection of his painting, and of the historic development in painting which he is helping to make, by the critics and the art establishment. He becomes himself the black mongrel that appears in his memories of his island.

Still, his absolute commitment to his art, a faith that is Walcott's, is his triumph and heroism. In the strange miracle of snow, despite the literal and metaphorical cold, 'he was determined' (*TH*, 41) to master the landscape, which he felt was his to claim by his art. However much he feels snubbed, he grows into the new landscape

and begins to discover in some of its characteristics – the visual effects of haze, mist, fog, drizzle, ‘glazed pavements’ (*TH*, 42) – the principles of painting that will constitute Impressionism: ‘there was no deity outdoors, no altar / in the rose window of the iris, light / was their faith’ (*TH*, 45). The visual image of wriggling that recurs through the poem suggests among other things the technique, the kind of brush stroke that will represent the effect of light on landscape in a certain way of seeing.

The first two chapters of Book Three recount Pissarro’s worsening circumstances, including the threat of mental breakdown, and culminating in the death of his beloved daughter. There is a harrowing description of his grief, a description effected by way of representing her father’s portrait of her, and by the narrative’s sliding between the point of view of the grief-stricken artist and the point of view of the narrator. Through all his grief, as it were unthinkingly, Pissarro painted. His painting ‘was the way he prayed’ (*TH*, 86).

After this climactic moment, the poet-biographer says, in chapter xiv, that his ‘narrative must pause’ (*TH*, 87). He now resumes his own story, but the Pissarro story shadows it, and on occasion specific parallels are indicated between the two. The poet’s story is not so much a narrative of events as a revisiting, in chapters xiv and xv, of some of the major, lifelong issues of self-affirmation for the colonial, Caribbean artist. Unlike Pissarro, he has returned to his island and to the haven of home. Locating himself at a ‘point where a river, straining to join the sea, / submerges itself in a sandbank’ (*TH*, 87), a liminal position marking the Caribbean/Atlantic divide and tension, he can contemplate dispassionately the cruel history that is the inheritance of the region. The ‘ropes of mangroves’ and ‘the murky reflections of the furrowed lagoon’ (*TH*, 88) are fraught with memories of slavery, ‘with old chains and anchors’, ‘such terrors that none of them are gone’ (*TH*, 89). ‘A broken windmill here and a crusted cauldron / are our open museum of bondage’ (*TH*, 89) – a cauldron such as the one in which Ma Kilman administered the curative bush bath to Philoctete in *Omeros*. Now, in this place without history, ‘with no echoes, / no gods’, ‘not a lament of absence,’ ‘no echo, only place’ (*TH*, 90), there is the peace that the heart desires – a place where, like ‘an egret’s ewer of light’ (*TH*, 90), ‘anger soars into grace’ (*TH*, 91). We are drawing nearer to *The Prodigal*.

'The empire of naming', he says, 'colonized even the trees' (*TH*, 92). But whereas once, as in *Another Life*, he found the breadfruit tree unrecorded in paintings, he can now celebrate it reverently: 'Bow to its dark green, motionless power, my love. . . / In it our history is remembered' (*TH*, 92). It is the same in painting. The landscape of the colonial island artist 'seemed to delight in its echo of / its French or Spanish original, down to the name' (*TH*, 92-3). But in the final section of chapter xv, he begins to describe in precise detail a dry, scorched St Lucian landscape. Word mimics paint, recalling his vow 'to get [the] true tints someday' (*TH*, 94). Here is a variation on the vow which, in *Another Life*, he said that he and Gregorias had sworn, that they 'would never leave the island. Until [they] had put down in paint, in words / . . . all of its sunken, leaf choked ravines' (*CP*, 194).

In chapter xvi we see the poet as painter. First he describes in fresh detail a scene at Gros Ilet, the village near which he lives, representing it as a putative painting by Pissarro. The parched, dusty scene evokes connections with Sahara dust and with all other 'dust' that has blown across the Atlantic 'from the most disparate places' (*TH*, 97), to produce the Caribbean people, 'History's afterthought' (*TH*, 96). Then follows an account of the painter in action: the careful 'rituals of preparation' (*TH*, 97), the fear, echoing Pissarro's doubt, that he will not 'get it right', but will achieve only 'the old result / of vigorous approximation' (*TH*, 97). Again we are reminded of *Another Life*, and especially of the remarkable chapter 9. His failures to render the landscape precisely are to him like betrayals of which he is guilty. He conducts a rigorous autopsy on these failures, 'more muck-fuss [a strikingly evocative coinage] than stipple' (*TH*, 99), suggesting a failure to catch the Impressionist touch. He rationalizes the failures with an explanation also relevant to his poetry:

If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess,
it was not from ambition but to touch the sublime,
to heighten the commonplace into the sacredness
of objects made radiant by the slow glaze of time . . . (*TH*, 98)

There is a long history of complaint by some critics against what they see as the rhetorical excess ('muck-fuss') of Walcott's poetry. It

may also be remarked that, in painting as in poetry, it is possible to touch the sublime without the use of rhetorical excess.

Chapter xvii picks up again, with reference to the Dreyfus affair, the poet's 'inexact and blurred biography' (*TH*, 101) of Pissarro. This self-critical description is, however, a modest way of explaining the nature of fiction's truth, whether in painting (as in Pissarro's) or literature, 'to deny fact, alter topography to its [fiction's] own map' (*TH*, 102). 'Conspirators, spies / are what all artists are, changing the truth' (*TH*, 102). Here Walcott rehearses his long-held idea of the inevitable treachery of art. In Walcott's fiction, the Dreyfus affair exacerbates in Pissarro the feeling that, in his recognition of only one empire, that of art, he has betrayed both St Thomas and France. His doubt increases, as does his 'terror of tradition' (*TH*, 105), the Christian-Renaissance tradition of Tiepolo and Veronese.

Chapter xviii, ending Book Three, shows how memory and imagination can make heart-catching connections, fulfilling the idea of poetry, of art as a medium of relationship and love. In the landscape of Spain, the poet's mind makes, in what may seem at first a digression, 'arches of echoes' (*TH*, 107) which reconnect him with three of his Jamaican friends, all now dead, two of them being also makers of fictions: John Figueroa, the poet, and John Hearne, the novelist. The third is Michael Manley, whom Walcott had fictionalized in 'The Star-Apple Kingdom'. When Walcott says of these dead friends, 'They were natural men' (*TH*, 108), we recall Eumaeus' praise of Odysseus in Walcott's *Odyssey*.

The final book, Book Four, the most discursive-analytic, brings to a head the major issues negotiated by the poem (and sometimes only implicit in the narrative). For instance, it is in Book Four that we hear the question which we will no doubt have already asked ourselves, 'What did the dog mean?' (*TH*, 135). It is in Book Four that the question of the motivation behind the poet's construction of Pissarro is addressed. In Book Four the narrative line becomes increasingly non-linear, if not labyrinthine, but this feature is, curiously enough, a function of the tying-together of the various thematic threads.

Book Four begins by returning the poem to the poet's quest for 'the phantom wolfhound' (*TH*, 119) of his memory (or imagination?), which will remain a central focus. The poet now visits

Venice to search the paintings of Tiepolo and Veronese – ‘my two Venetians’ (*TH*, 118) – in museums there. He hopes, by comparing their styles, to figure out which one must have painted the hound. But still the hound eludes him and the quest becomes increasingly feverish. If he couldn’t be sure in which of the two painters’ work he has seen the hound, then maybe he has ‘never learnt the difference/ between Veronese’s gift and Tiepolo’s’ (*TH*, 134). His failure to find the hound is analogous both to his failure to be quite the painter he had hoped to be and to Pissarro’s failure to be adequately recognized in his lifetime.

Moreover, what if he had been pursuing a figment, ‘a melody of error’, and ‘all [he] had written of the hound was false’ (*TH*, 134)? What ‘if faith were just the fiction of a fiction’ (*TH*, 121)? This self-questioning leads to questions about the relationship between memory and imagination, art and reality, and the truth of fiction – questions that had first come to the fore in *Another Life*. Still, against the doubt and panic, Walcott asserts his faith in the power of imagination and the illuminative virtue of art, just as his Pissarro, against doubt and despair, continued to paint: ‘And yet I hold my ground and hold it till / I trace the evasive hound beyond my fear / that it never existed’ (*TH*, 134).

So, although he never finds the hound, his quest yields other kinds of illumination, such as awareness of, or reconnection with certain truths of his colonial condition. Ultimately it leads to the understanding that his quest is a quest for self: ‘I was searching for myself now’ (*TH*, 124). For instance, he begins to notice that in some of the paintings he looks at there is the figure of a Moor holding a hound on a leash, and ‘that every hound had its attendant Moor’ (*TH*, 124). He realizes that he himself is that figure, the marginalized black, African, Caribbean artist/poet, ‘the admiring African [who] peers from the canvas’s edge’ (*TH*, 129). He realizes that his pursuit of the hound has led him, in its labyrinthine course (*TH*, 127), the course of the poem so to speak, to the marginalization that Caribbean history had produced, and to the idea of history with which he had wrestled throughout his career: ‘To History [note the capital], a bellowing Minotaur / pursued and slain’ (*TH*, 127), to ‘this mixed obscenity made by the two / coupling worlds’, ‘a beast / that was my fear, my self, my craft, / not the white elegant

wolfhound at the feast' (*TH*, 127). He says, 'I was both slain and slayer' (*TH*, 128). In other words, he was at one and the same time the monster History, a construct or product of that History, and the liberator-poet (Theseus with the aid of the craftsman Daedalus) who slays the monster. By slaying this monster he will 'elevate [his] race from its foul lair / by prayer, by poetry, by couplets repeated / over its carcase' (*TH*, 128).

Now, significantly, he remembers a moment when, walking in New York City's Greenwich Village in the fall, he sees 'a cool blonde cross[ing] Christopher [Street]'. She is attended by a white hound, although the poet, in the radiance of the moment, imagines a 'brace' of hounds. She hails a taxi and drives away with the hound. The action then cuts to the poet-persona's memory of himself, in a 'tired taxi, rattling towards Kennedy [airport]' (*TH*, 153). The fall landscape through which he moves now signals decrepitude and death. He turns to look through the rear windscreen and sees, 'racing the taxi', 'the shadowy ecstasy / of a black mongrel loping behind glass' (*TH*, 153). Here is another phantom hound, answering the need of the imagination, more real than any actual hound. The black mongrel now bespeaks an ecstasy which shadows the ecstatic flash from the thigh of the white wolfhound.

Earlier, in the final section of chapter XXII, the poet recounts having 'found', on a beach presumably St Lucian, 'something still unpainted', 'requiring no research', 'a tottering, abandoned, homeless thing', 'A starved pup trembling by the hard sea', 'a parody of Tiepolo's hound', but it arrests the deepest emotional attention of the poet-persona and his female companion, who 'cried out in compassion'. In a redemptive gesture,

she moaned and picked it up,
this was the mongrel's heir, not in a great
fresco, but bastardy, abandonment, and hope
and love enough perhaps to help it live
like all its breed, and charity, and care,
we set it down in the village to survive
like all my ancestry. The hound was here. (*TH*, 138-9)

So, in a moment of transfiguring recognition, the elusive white hound of the poet's quest becomes the despised black mongrel which was always there in the corner of his eyes, at the edge of the

painting. The mongrel is the Caribbean people and culture – ‘our mongrel culture’ (*TH*, 154) – seen under the contemptuous gaze of history, ‘the way’, as Walcott says in his Nobel lecture, ‘the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized’ (*WTS*, 67). In the poem’s metamorphosis of metaphor, the mongrel-Minotaur has been valorized.

Recognition and acceptance of the mongrel are integral to the reflections on the relationship between Pissarro and himself with which the poet subtilizes and complicates the poem’s close. The general sense of parallel between the two lives is now complicated by the quizzical positing of real differences between them. Walcott thinks of the young Pissarro painting in St Thomas and wonders whether the blacks, so much a part of the landscape around him, had meant anything more to him than as figures in paintings. By contrast, the poet becomes one with the nameless blacks in Pissarro’s St Thomas paintings, ‘a young slave, mixed and newly manumitted’ (*TH*, 141), the ‘mixed’ linking him with mongrel and Minotaur.

The implied dialogue between Walcott and Pissarro that has run through the poem now becomes explicit and heightened. As one of the ‘Mission-accomplished [a deft *double entendre*], exile-humming niggers’ (*TH*, 141) whom Pissarro had painted, the poet addresses Pissarro, telling him he could have been their ‘pioneer’ (*TH*, 142), the Gauguin of St Thomas, artistic master of an ‘archipelago, where / hues are primal, red tree, green shade, blue water’ (*TH*, 142). However, ‘St Thomas stays unpainted’ (*TH*, 143), like the mongrel. Under the dialogue with Pissarro, under the question of whether Pissarro had ‘betrayed’ (*TH*, 143) his island, is the sub-text of Walcott’s chronic self-questioning, his fear that he too may have been guilty of betrayal, by reason of having been too much the wanderer, too concerned to relate to European and North American landscapes and, by extension, culture.

As the poem draws to its multi-faceted, prismatic end, themes are deftly folded into one another. The critical interrogation of Pissarro is interleaved with a brief, compassionate rounding-off of Pissarro’s biography and discriminating praise of his genius and the intensity of his commitment to painting. Pointedly, in the narrative sequence Pissarro’s death occurs just as Walcott returns home. This soul-satisfying return, to complete the task which he had set himself

in youth, to paint the villages, is folded into praise of those who stayed to live their 'slow belief in [their] own nature' (*TH*, 157). This line of thought accommodates the introduction of a poem, chapter XXI, section 3, about the Rastafarians of Jamaica, who, in an ambivalent description, 'have designed themselves so that what remains / is the Coptic fantasy in their stoned faces' (*TH*, 131); 'banners and beards are one in their design, / figures not Veronese's nor Tiepolo's' (*TH*, 132). The poem ends with the poet's thanksgiving, valediction and benediction – a benediction that redeems 'the repeated failures, the botched trepidations' (*TH*, 163) of Pissarro and himself.

Homecoming: The Prodigal

This book was waiting for *The Prodigal* (2004) to complete it. Not only because, at the end, the poet, characteristically addressing himself, describes *The Prodigal* as 'what will be your last book' (*P*, 99), but more so because the poem seems to draw together in summarizing evaluation many of the concerns that have run through Walcott's work. The valedictory note of the volume only deepens the retrospective summing-up, and is itself the summation of all the leave-takings, actual and anticipated, that have been a feature of his work. This poem is the culmination of all the homecomings in Walcott's poetry that have been rehearsals, as it were, for this one. It replays definitively the cycle of separation and reconnection that has been a dynamic idea in his work.

In a 1983 interview, when Nancy Schoenberger asked Walcott about his 'youthful desire to leave home', he replied by referring to James Joyce and saying that 'there can only be a reconciliation when there has been a sundering'. This sundering 'is just a process of growth', but necessary. A 'writer has to . . . delineate himself from his background, so he can be *in* it distinctly' (*CDW*, 88). As Walcott was to say in *Tiepolo's Hound*, 'Separation only brings / sharper definition' (*TH*, 99). However, the writer has to return home so that the cycle can be completed. Hemingway 'would have been even greater had he come back [to America] to make the final link in the circle'. Such a return is essentially spiritual and is 'not just nostalgia'. It brings first 'a bleakness beyond nostalgia, and then a radiant serenity' (*CDW*, 88). In *The Prodigal* Walcott completes the circle.

The 'riotous living' in which this Prodigal Son thinks he may have 'wasted his substance' is simply all his wandering, of one kind

or another, his 'untethered pilgrimage' (*P*, 30). (But we note the purpose and responsibility in 'pilgrimage.') The pain is all the sharper to one who is so passionately attached to 'home'. So now he asks himself, 'Prodigal, what were your wanderings about?' (*P*, 70). The poem is the question and its answer. As we have seen, Walcott's poetry has constructed for him an Odyssean persona, hooked on wandering but always yearning for home. This is one level of meaning available in the sigh in the Odyssean title poem of *Sea Grapes*: 'The ancient war / between obsession and responsibility / will never finish' (*CP*, 297).

Not surprisingly then, *The Prodigal* covers a lot of ground, and not just spatially. With it, Walcott continues to work variations on the long narrative mode. The poem moves back and forth in time and memory, making connections across the span of his life and his books. It is as if the poem, as it evolved, drew into itself all the possibilities for short poems that crossed its horizon. Virtually every section can stand on its own as a whole poem, but all contribute to a whole that is as real in its disjunctions as in its continuities. In his 1990 interview with J.P. White, Walcott, using the sea as a symbol for a way of movement and being that contrasts with those of what is conventionally called history, said: 'With the sea, you can travel the horizon in any direction, you can go from left to right or from right to left. It doesn't proceed from A to B to C to D and so on' (*CDW*, 158-9). This description is appropriate to the movement of *The Prodigal*.

Still, there is an overarching shape. The book is in three parts, comprising eighteen cantos or chapters, each divided variously into three, four or five sub-sections or poems. In this kind of structure it resembles *Tiepolo's Hound* and *Omeros*, as also in the sustaining of one verse form throughout, in this case a loose, flexible blank verse, sometimes almost sliding into free verse. Here again is Walcott's discipline of form that balances and allows a free play of thought. The line and inflection of *The Prodigal* can carry a clean, well paced narrative movement of physical action:

A shot rang out and the green Vespa skidded
off the curb into a ditch below a fence
of rusty cactus and the beautiful soldier lay
on the dry grass verge staring at the blue sky. . . (*P*, 49)

Or they can switch to a cumulative resonance of awe and what the poet calls 'chaotic sentences of seaweed / plucked by the sandpiper's darting concentration' (*CP*, 95).

The narrative, even cinematic verve is sharpened by the discreet thread of a sexual-romantic interest that flickers through the poem, in glimpses of beautiful women who embody the poet's feeling for the landscape and lifestyle of the particular place with which each is identified. Ilse, Roberta, Esperanza, Constanza or the Irish actress in Pescara, playing Nora Joyce: their presence makes us smile at the pluck in 'the old boy', even as it sharpens the pathos of his condition. 'I look and no longer sigh for the impossible', he says, 'panting over a cupidinous coffee', as 'the peaches of summer [bounce] on the grids of the Milanese sidewalks / in halters cut close to the coccyx' (*P*, 86). The fascination of the distancing of self-scrutiny by way of shifting between 'I' and 'you' and 'he' to identify the protagonist-narrator, the fictionalizing of the self, which has been a feature of his poetry, is now summed up by the poet when he observes:

In my effort to arrive at the third person
has lain the ordeal, because whoever the 'he' is,
he can suffer, he can make his own spasms, he can die,
I can look at him and smile uncontrollably. (*P*, 87)

In Parts I and II the poet-persona is travelling abroad, 'elsewhere'. In Part III he returns home, 'here'. The poem extends and sums up the dialogue between 'here' and 'elsewhere' which has been a significant aspect of Walcott's poetry and his self-quest since *The Fortunate Traveller*. It is as if the wanderings recounted in Parts I and II, which also stand for all the kinds of wandering that have constituted Walcott's work, are there to require and sharpen the poignancy of the homecoming of Part III. In canto I the poet-persona is in the United States, but even in a particular location he is the wanderer. From the outset, in New York City, he is 'wandering the Village' (Greenwich Village), or, in a Korean restaurant in Boston, his imagination takes him to Asia, to 'shaggy Mongolian horsemen / in steaming tents while their mares stamped the snow' (*P*, 8). Then he travels to Europe. In successive cantos in the rest of Part I he is flying over the Alps, he is in Switzerland, in Milan, Abruzzi, Pescara, but especially Milan. Part II takes him to

Latin America, to Colombia and Mexico. He is coming closer to home.

His descriptive genius is evidence of how he imagines himself into strange landscapes, even while conveying a sense of their strangeness. And they were not exactly strange, since he had long imagined them through his reading. For instance, his aerial view of the awesome expanse of the snow-blanketed Alps, the absolute, primal, blazing, freezing whiteness, is charged not only with his fear of heights, but also with his deep childhood memory of fairy tales that had both inspired and terrified him:

There were the absolute,
these peaks, the pitch of temperature and terror,
polar rigidities that magnetized a child
these rocks bearded with icicles, crevasses
from Andersen's 'Ice Maiden', Whittier's 'Snow Bound',
this empire, this infernity of ice. (*P*, 14)

On 17 October, 1965, in *MS One of Another Life*, Walcott had made an entry evoking the memory of his emotional childhood response to the tale of the Ice Maiden. 'Snow and death. The princess was frozen alive in her cold glass coffin. He imagined whiteness, waste, annihilation . . . Whoever kissed the cold, burning lips of the Ice Maiden was seared with an ecstasy of death' (*MS One*, 61). Now, in *The Prodigal*, the Ice Maiden is 'a blond waitress in Zermatt' (*P*, 15).

In other moments too, as he moves through Europe, some chance meeting, some detail of landscape sends his mind reaching back for home and into the past. For instance, 'the old gentlemen at lunch in Lausanne' (*P*, 16) makes him think of Rembrandt's painting *Syndics of the Drapers' Guild*, which his imagination searches for a face that might be that of 'a negligible ancestor / . . . greeting [him] / a product of his empire's miscegenation / in old St Martin' (*P*, 16). This meeting would have been a replay of Shabine's meeting with History, his own and his region's. In Italy he records the number of a bus route, 'Bus No. 63 L90 Pugliese', and then observes, 'whereas no echo in the name Gros Ilet, / no literature, no history, at least until now' (*P*, 28). And, indeed, he has brought Gros Islet into literature and history. At the end of Part 1 he is back in New York

City. When an Italian neighbour asks him why he didn't stay longer in Italy, he replies, 'I have an island' (*P*, 39).

In Part II, in Latin America, he is that much nearer to that island. When he arrives in Cartagena from Baranquilla and sees the Caribbean, he remarks, 'Not a new coast, but home' (*P*, 45). More importantly, though, and with a cruel irony appropriate to the poem's narrative trajectory, it is here in Latin America that he gets the heart-rending news of his twin brother Roddy's death. This news not only heightens his sense of his own mortality, but also returns him spiritually to his beginnings. The poem's Mexican episode (canto 9) is really an elegy for Roddy. The record of the news of the death is all the more poignant for the matter-of-fact, conversational style: 'March 11. 8.35 a.m. Guadalajara, Saturday. / Roddy. Toronto. Cremated today. / . . . Roddy. Where are you this bright afternoon? / I am watching a soccer match listlessly' (*P*, 50). As he recalls this moment, his mind goes out to all the dear departed who lie in the cemetery 'where my brother and our mother live now / at the one address, so many are their neighbours' (*P*, 51). The wanderer, the poet, is completing his circle.

Part III is the most nuanced and fully explored of all the homecomings that have featured across the span of Walcott's poetry. The poem now breathes moments of gratitude for the 'balm' and 'benediction' (*P*, 68) of return to the loved and nurturing starting place:

A grey dawn, dun. Rain-gauze shrouding the headlands.
A rainbow like a bruise through cottony cumuli.
Then, health! Salvation! Sails blaze in the sun.
A twin-sailed shallop rounding Pigeon Island.
This line is my horizon.
I cannot be happier than this. (*P*, 92)

These lines enact the sequence from 'bleakness beyond nostalgia' to 'radiant serenity'. The succession of short decisive phrases and simple sentences enhances the sense of certainty. Passages like these bring to mind Joachim du Bellay's sonnet 'Heureux qui comme Ulysse',¹ which sings the man who, like Ulysses, after long wandering returns home. Walcott had quoted that opening phrase in chapter 6 of *Another Life*, in a somewhat ironic reference to Captain Foquarde. Significantly, too, the programme for the Royal

Shakespeare Company's production of Walcott's *Odyssey*, in its 1993–4 season, carries an English translation of Du Bellay's poem.²

The sense of completion, of a journey coming full circle, is underscored when the poet recalls the commitment he had made at the start of his career:

There was a vow I made, rigid apprentice,
to the horizontal sunrise, acolyte
to the shallows' imprecations, to the odour
of earth turned by the rain . . .
. . . swearing not to leave them
for real principalities in Berlin or Milan,
but my craft's irony was in betrayal . . . (P, 94–5)

This takes us back to the moment in *Another Life* when, speaking for Gregorias and himself, the poet recorded,

But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
.
.
.
That we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
.
.
.
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines . . . (CP, 194)

The sense that his 'wanderings' may have constituted a betrayal of this vow has informed all his subsequent work, but, curiously enough, the articulation of that fear is itself an indication that in some deep-rooted way he has never departed from the vow. Besides, what he calls the irony of betrayal is in its turn balanced by the fact that he now calls the vow the expression of a 'rigid' young mind.

So *The Prodigal's* homecoming is not a simple matter of forgetting the wanderings and saying, 'Here I am', and all questions are settled. It is a reflective, still questing and self-questioning return. It is sobering. At a village fête the sheep that is killed and eaten is not the Biblical Prodigal's 'fatted calf', and our Prodigal's 'pale feet cannot keep time / feel no communion with the celebrants' (P, 81). Although in the 'flare of the flame tree' and in the shadow of 'the darkening trees, the pouis / against the Santa Cruz hills' 'great cities [are] receding, Madrid, Genoa' (P, 75), they still rise in his memory, and his imagination cannot but make connections. His mind flashes back to 'a white terrace in Rimini' and to how a 'young waitress'

there reminded him of his 'first love' (*P*, 89), and we return – 'Christ, over fifty years. Half a century!' (*P*, 89) – to his love for Anna immortalized in *Another Life*. In bringing to a head and to a kind of resolution the story of his complex colonial's relationship with Europe he makes memorable summations of issues that he has worried at throughout his poetic journey: 'So has it come to this, to have to choose?' (*P*, 77) – 'no, the point is not comparison or mimicry' (*P*, 75). Europe and his wanderings have also made him – 'Both worlds are welded, they were seamed with delight' (*P*, 71).

The poem, which wanders so widely, is, in the end, very much about one man's quest for himself: 'wandering the Village in search of another subject / other than yourself, it is yourself you meet' (*P*, 6). *The Prodigal*, then, is as much about the point of view from which its author now views the world (which in some ways is how he has always viewed the world) as it is about anything else. So he says of the book, 'Look at it any way you like, it's an old man's book' (*P*, 8) – 'old man coming through the glass, who are you?' (*P*, 86). He sees himself in other ageing men he meets, in his reflection in the mirror, in the time of day:

dusk delicate as an old gentleman
with mottled hands and watery eyes, our host.
Diabetic, dying, my double. (*P*, 17)

One thinks of Yeats' cry in 'Sailing to Byzantium':

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress . . .³

Our ageing Prodigal, gazing wincingly but squarely at 'the disassembled man' (*P*, 53) in the mirror of his mind, nonetheless still claps his hands and sings as movingly as ever. At the end, on a dolphin-sighting boat ride up the islands, when, against his scepticism, the legendary creatures break water:

a fin-hint!
not a crest, and then splaying open under the keel
and racing with the bow, the legend broke water
and was reborn, her screams of joy
and my heart drumming harder . . . (*P*, 103)

The rhythm pulses onward as his heart drums harder through a sentence many lines long. The moment is visionary and brings to mind, but in a somewhat different key, the 'dolphin-torn [and] gong-tormented sea' of Yeats' 'Byzantium'.⁴

If anyone had told him, the poet-Prodigal says,

'On a day of great delight you will see dolphins'

...

I would not have believed in them, being too old

and sceptical of the fury of one life's

determined benedictions, but they are here.

Angels and dolphins. (*P*, 105)

The faith which, long ago, in 'Return to D'Ennery, Rain,' Walcott said he had lost was never really lost; it had barrelled too deep under the keel of his heart. As always with Walcott, there is home and there is home. It is instructive to recall an observation which he made, some twenty years earlier, about the difference between Homer's and Dante's endings of the story of Odysseus' wanderings. Whereas in Homer Odysseus 'goes home and everything is fine . . . in Dante what's marvellous is that he decides, "I have to leave, I have to go out and learn more, to seek experience of the world"'.⁵ Significantly, *The Prodigal* ends, not with the image of an old man at rest in his serene little acre, but with an extension of the sea-going, horizon-widening image:

And always certainly, steadily, on the bright rim
of the world, getting no nearer or nearer, the more
the bow's wedge shuddered towards it, prodigal,
that line of light that shines from that other shore. (*P*, 105)

That is the eventual radiance which Walcott's work has always sought.

Notes

I WALCOTT, WRITING AND THE CARIBBEAN: ISSUES AND DIRECTIONS

- 1 Tejumola Olaniyan tells of his first meeting with a scholar-friend who also has a special interest in Walcott: 'I told him casually that I read Walcott's plays more frequently than his poems. My scholar-friend was startled, he was unaware that Walcott is also a dramatist, much less *the* leading dramatist of the West Indies . . . I have learned since that articles on Walcott published in America are more likely to focus on his poetry than his drama' ('Performance Anxiety: Derek Walcott's Peripheral Vision', *Transition*, 70 (1996), 82). Cf. Rei Terada in her entry on Walcott in the *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993. After speaking about his play and his essays, she continues: 'Walcott's most important work, however, is his poetry' (p. 271).
- 2 See, for example, Dennis Scott, 'Walcott on Walcott', and Sharon Ciccarelli, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott', both in *CDW*.
- 3 University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, 1979.
- 4 The idea is articulated in 'What the Twilight Says', when, for instance, Walcott speaks about 'the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new' (*DMM*, 17). The idea was explicit in Walcott from much earlier, at least from 1963, in his review of Dennis Williams' *Other Leopards* (see n. 20 below).
- 5 See Edward Baugh, 'The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History', *Tapia* (20 February 1977), 6-7; (27 February 1977), 6-7, II. The idea of Walcott's 'quarrel with history' was taken up by James Wieland, *The Ensphering Mind* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1988), chapter 2. Many other critics have subsequently focussed on Walcott's concern with history, as the list of secondary sources will show.

- 6 V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962), p. 29.
- 7 See, for instance, John Figueroa, 'A Note on Derek Walcott's Concern with Nothing', *Revista Interamericana*, 4 (Fall 1974), 422–8.
- 8 Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to My Native Land*), trans. Emile Snyder (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), p. 110. Césaire's presence is active, both in respect of form and ideas, in a somewhat neglected poem by Walcott, 'Origins', which first appeared in his *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964).
- 9 The phrase from Froude is part of the longer quotation used by Walcott as epigraph to 'Air' (*CP*, 113–14), discussed in chapter 2 below.
- 10 Derek Walcott, 'A Dilemma Faces W. I. Artists', *Sunday Guardian*, 12 January 1964, p. 3.
- 11 Derek Walcott, in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), p. 53.
- 12 Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, p. 122.
- 13 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (London: Michael Joseph, 1953), p. 221.
- 14 Walcott, in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Hamner, p. 57.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 17 See Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, vol. 11 (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), e.g. p. 327.
- 18 In Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1992), p. 265.
- 19 Walcott has explained that what he had to say about race in 'What the Twilight Says' 'was actually written at a point, at a peak in the Black Power movement in which one could say unless people were blue-black, they were not Negroes or Black or African' (*New World Adams*, ed. Dance, p. 262). See also Walcott's 1977 interview with Edward Hirsch: 'I was writing against the African influence during a period when the political nostalgia seemed to be a deceit' (*CDW*, 56).
- 20 Derek Walcott, 'His Is the Pivotal One About Race', *Sunday Guardian*, 1 December 1963, p. 23.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Trinidad Guardian*, 28 September 1964, p. 8 (reprinted in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* ed. Hamner).
- 23 In *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Hamner, p. 20.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Ibid.*

- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.
- 28 Cf. Luis Rafael Sanchez, for whom ‘mixed blood and blackness’ have equal primacy in the definition of Caribbean identity: ‘neither the denial of grandparents nor the concealment of frizzy hair under an obliging turban . . . can manage to deny that mixed blood and blackness constitute the destiny of the Antilles’. (‘Voyage to the Caribbean Identity’, trans. Alfred MacAdam, *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, 47 (Fall 1993), 21).
- 29 Isidore Okpewho, ‘Walcott, Homer, and the “Black Atlantic”,’ *Research in African Literatures*, 33: 1 (Spring 2002), 39. For another useful consideration of Walcott’s treatment of the African factor in Caribbean literature, see Abiola Irele’s unpublished lecture, ‘Black Utopia: Lecture II. What is Africa To Me?’ (The McMillan-Stewart Lectures, Harvard University, April 2001).
- 30 It may be that the time span and consequent difference in historical contexts between these two statements account for the difference between the two views of the matter.
- 31 Walcott, ‘His Is the Pivotal One about Race’, p. 23.
- 32 Robert Graves, quoted on dust jacket of Walcott, *Selected Poems*.
- 33 Joseph Brodsky, ‘On Derek Walcott,’ *New York Review of Books*, 19 November. 1983, p. 41. The essay reappears in Brodsky’s *Less Than One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), under the title ‘The Sound of the Tide’, but, interestingly, without the original last paragraph, from which the quotation is taken.
- 34 Brad Leithauser, ‘Ancestral Rhyme’, *The New Yorker*, 61:52 (11 February 1991), 91–5.
- 35 See Edward Baugh, ‘Metaphor and Plainness in the Poetry of Derek Walcott,’ *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 11 (July 1970), 47–58.
- 36 Caribbean Voices Archive, University of Birmingham Library.
- 37 J. Edward Chamberlin, *Come Back To Me My Language: Poetry and the West Indies* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), p. 113.
- 38 However, Walcott is not above finding much American verse too local in its range and focus, ‘so small, so provincial, . . . that all that it takes in is the neighbourhood, the next farm, or the next street’ (CDW, 205).
- 39 Brodsky, *Less Than One*, p. 166.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

2 CONNECTIONS AND SEPARATIONS: FROM ‘25 POEMS’ TO ‘THE GULF’

- 1 This has been generally recognized by critics. See, for example, Stewart Brown’s chapter ‘The Apprentice’, in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1991).

- 2 Robert Mazzocco, 'Three Poets', *New York Review of Books*, 3:10 (31 December 1964), 18–20.
- 3 Joseph Brodsky, 'A Hidden Duet: the Intimate Connection Between the "Magdalene" Poems of Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva', *Times Literary Supplement* (27 August 1999), p. 13.
- 4 See, for instance, Lloyd W. Brown, 'The Personal Odyssey of Derek Walcott', in *West Indian Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 118–38.
- 5 25 *Poems* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, B.W.I.: Guardian Commercial Printery, 1948; 2nd edn, Bridgetown, Barbados: Advocate Co., 1949), p. 19.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Poems* (Kingston, Jamaica: City Printery Ltd., c. 1951), p. 6.
- 8 Roy Fuller, 'The Poetry of D. A. Walcott', BBC *Caribbean Voices* transcripts, University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Jamaica, box no.5.
- 9 Roy Fuller, 'Derek Walcott's Latest Poems Reviewed', *Caribbean Voices* transcripts, box no.9.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 The quotation was presumably taken from a letter to Frank Collymore which has not survived.
- 12 *Bim*, 7: 26 (January–June 1958), p. 65.
- 13 In *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry*, ed. Oscar Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 338.
- 14 The name in the earlier version (*Bim*) is Frankheim, which makes the Conradian echo even clearer. However, the change to Franklin was appropriate in that it located the story with that bit more verisimilitude in the ambit of British colonialism.
- 15 See, for instance, John Figueroa, 'Derek Walcott's "Poopa, Da' Was a Fête!" and Evan Jones' "Lament of the Banana Man"', in *Critics on Caribbean Literature*, ed. Edward Baugh (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 153–61.
- 16 See, for instance, David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004).
- 17 In *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, pp. 212–19.
- 18 Derek Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe', in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, pp. 33–40.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 21 T. S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Erect', in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 43.

- 22 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, 2nd edn, ed. Reginald L. Cook (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1969), p. 80.
 - 23 Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 The St Antoine, remembered in chapter 1 of *Another Life*, was destroyed by fire not long after the poem was written.
 - 26 This poem is the subject of very detailed and comprehensive explication by John Lennard, in *The Poetry Handbook*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
 - 27 Wayne Brown, ed. *Derek Walcott, Selected Poetry* (London, Kingston, Port of Spain: Heinemann, 1981), p. 121.
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- 3 'WHAT A MAN IS': 'DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN AND OTHER PLAYS', 'THE HAITIAN TRILOGY' AND 'FRANKLIN'
 - 1 Bruce King, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 434.
 - 2 Bruce King records that Walcott sent the play to Robert Giroux of Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1966, but Giroux' response was not encouraging (*ibid.*, p. 230).
 - 3 Walcott, 'The Royal Palms', an uncollected poem, in *Negro Verse*, ed. Anselm Hollo (London: Vista Books, 1964), p. 16.
 - 4 Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision: 'Another Life'* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 43. This idea was later developed in Patrick Anthony's Ph.D. thesis, 'Symbol, Myth, and Ritual in Selected Plays of Derek Walcott' (University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, 2000).
 - 5 Walcott, in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, p. 48.
 - 6 *Ibid.*
 - 7 See, for instance, Roger D. Abrahams, *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
 - 8 Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Act III, scene iii, lines 15–22 (p. 170).
 - 9 For an account of a 1998 production, in Trinidad, of *Drums and Colours*, which exploited the Carnival possibilities of the play, see Rawle Gibbons, '"Band Meet Band": Carnival and Text in a Production of *Drums and Colours*', *Caribe 2000* (1999), 95–105.
 - 10 'Picong' – a Trinidadian colloquialism for an improvisational verbal joust, witty and humorous, between calypsonians.
 - 11 'Test', pronounced 'tess' – a Trinidadian slang word for a person, a man (fellow) or woman.

- 12 See Travis Weekes, 'The Fire's Shadows: Derek Walcott and the Haitian Revolution', unpublished paper, presented at the Haitian Bicentennial Conference, University of the West Indies, St Augustine, June 2004.
- 13 Walcott, in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, p. 49.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 See Richard Allsopp's entry on 'God' in his *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- 16 Walcott speaks about this aspect of these plays in his essay 'Meanings' (in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, pp. 45–50) and in his interview with Sharon Ciccarelli (CDW, pp. 34–49). See also King, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 154–6.
- 17 Anthony Boxill, 'The Conteur as Mythmaker in Derek Walcott's *Malcochon, or Six in the Rain*', *Commonwealth*, 13 (1991), 2, 1–7.
- 18 *Ti-Jean's* moment of human affirmation is an expression of that reverence for life which is the high point of the watershed chapter 22 of *Another Life*, as it is of his celebration, in *The Bounty*, of the blessing of what it is to be human. This kind of feeling finds poignant lyrical expression in 'The Cloud' (SG, 9).
- 19 *Ti-Jean: A Play in One Act*, mimeograph, Jamaica: University College of the West Indies Extra-Mural Department (c. 1957), in the Library, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.
- 20 Albert Olu Ashaolu, in 'Allegory in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*', *World Literature in English*, 16:1 (1977), 203–11, identifies six levels of allegory in the play, but these are in effect subdivisions of the two identified here.
- 21 'St Lucians ... have a supernatural slavey called "*ti bolom*". He is a foetus, which must be a mother's first pregnancy, stolen from her womb just before birth by a *jâ gajé* [French *gens engagés*, conscripted persons]. He looks like a foetus, large eyes, bow legged, and naked, is particularly adept at climbing through barred bank windows and "t'iefing" (stealing) money [for] his master.' (Daniel J. Crowley, 'Supernatural Beings in St Lucia', *The Caribbean*, 8:11 and 12 (1955), 264.)
- 22 See Derek Walcott, 'Derek's "Most West Indian Play"', *Sunday Guardian Magazine*, 21 June 1970, p. 7.
- 23 In *Sunday Guardian Magazine*, 25 December 1966, p. 20.
- 24 In Allsopp's *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the entry for 'Crick-crack!' reads: 'Formula used to introduce a Nancy [Ananse] story or folktale, and also (usu. with an accompanying rhyme) to end it. In some cases the story-teller first cries *Crick!* [or *Messieurs, Crick!*] and the audience response is *Crack!*'
- 25 For a note on the green flash, see *Another Life*, eds. Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2004), p. 228.

- 26 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 60.
- 27 There is an area called Monkey Hill in the environs of Castries.
- 28 Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 104.
- 29 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 229.

4 'IS THERE THAT I BORN': 'ANOTHER LIFE',
'SEA GRAPES', 'THE STAR-APPLE KINGDOM'

- 1 Farrar, Straus and Giroux Archives, Box 374, New York Public Library.
- 2 John Thieme, *Derek Walcott* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 88.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 4 Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 20.
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 19.
- 6 In *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, pp. 24–32.
- 7 Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, p. 11.
- 8 For a comment on the identity of these 'Caribs', see Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, eds. Baugh and Nepaulsingh, p. 279.
- 9 *The New Yorker*, 28 October 1972, pp. 36–7.
- 10 'A Great Russian Novel', *Sunday Guardian*, 19 April 1964, p. 15.
- 11 Patrick Anthony, 'The Silent Revolution', *Caribbean Contact*, August 1977, p. 11.
- 12 Dunstan St Omer, 'St Lucia's Black Christ', *Environ*, 1 (1977), p. 59.
- 13 In *New Letters*, 40 (October 1973), 62–3.
- 14 A few of the 1970s poems of the Jamaican poet Mervyn Morris (e.g. 'Afro-Saxon', 'For Consciousness', 'The Daemon Hunter'), in his collection *Shadowboxing* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1979) also turn a searchlight on the agenda of the then fashionable 'brotherhood'.
- 15 Wayne Brown, 'Adam's Song', *The Sunday Observer*, 31 January 1999, p. 20.
- 16 See Victor D. Questel, 'Sea Grapes is master piece of poetic craftsmanship' *Sunday Guardian*, Independence Supplement, 28 August 1977, pp. 38–40; Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 94–100.
- 17 *American Poetry Review*, 1:5 (January – February 1976), and *London Magazine*, 15:6 (February–March 1976).
- 18 Derek Walcott, 'On Choosing Port of Spain', in *David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago*, eds. Michael Anthony and Andrew Carr (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975), p. 16.

- 19 Wayne Brown, in Derek Walcott, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Wayne Brown (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 130.
- 20 Ric Mentus, 'Walcott: Nobody Wants To Be a West Indian' (interview with Derek Walcott), *The Jamaica Daily News*, 7 December 1975, p. 5.
- 21 Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 189–90.
- 22 Lloyd W. Brown, 'The Personal Odyssey of Derek Walcott', pp. 118–38.
- 23 Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto, eds., *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 166–74.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- 25 Philip (later Sir Philip) Sherlock (1902–2000) was at that time Vice-Principal of the University College of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, and its Director of Extra-Mural Studies.
- 26 The first Professor of English at Mona was Kenneth Croston, under whom Walcott studied. 'Crossland' is no doubt a mis-transcription from an audiotape.
- 27 Ric Mentus, 'Walcott Set the Dilemma of W.I. Leaders to Verse', *The Jamaica Daily News*, 18 June 1978, p. 4.
- 28 Gloria Escoffery, 'Walcott's Starapple Kingdom', *Sunday Gleaner*, 2 August 1981, p. 4.
- 29 Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry* (Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies Press, 2001), p. 263.
- 30 Benjamin DeMott, 'Poems of Caribbean Wounds', in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Hamner, p. 301.

5 THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: THE DRAMATIST AFTER 'DREAM'

- 1 Derek Walcott, 'Derek Walcott Talks about *The Joker of Seville*', *Carib*, 4 (1986), 2.
- 2 Walcott did reach Broadway, in January 1998, with the musical *The Capeman* at the Marquis Theatre, for which Paul Simon composed the music. The two collaborated on the book and lyrics, and it is impossible to differentiate Walcott's contribution. The story is based on the sad misadventures of a young Puerto Rican immigrant in New York, who was sentenced to death for the murder of two white teenagers. The play, harshly criticized by reviewers, closed after a very short run. An earlier Broadway-inclined musical, which did not go far, was *Marie LaVeau*, with music by Galt MacDermot, the story of a New Orleans conjure woman of the early 1800s. It premiered at the College of the

- Virgin Islands, St Thomas, in November 1979. (See Jeremy Taylor, 'Walcott to Broadway', *The Express*, 2 June 1980, pp. 14–15.) There was also another musical, the unpublished *Steel* (the story of a Trinidadian 'pan man'), also with score by MacDermot, premiered by the American Repertory Theatre in 1991. A revised version was produced in Port of Spain in 2005.
- 3 See Bruce King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 247–9.
 - 4 Judy Stone, 'At last, Masterpiece on the Middle Class', *Trinidad Guardian*, 13 July 1979, p. 4.
 - 5 *The Wine of the Country* was performed at the University College of the West Indies, Jamaica, in 1956.
 - 6 Walcott, *The Wine of the Country*, unpublished mimeograph (c. 1956), the Library, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, p. 5.
 - 7 Stone, 'At Last, Masterpiece,' p. 4.
 - 8 Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), defines pappyshow as, among other things, 'A person fit to be ridiculed'.
 - 9 Patricia Ismond, 'Walcott's Later Drama: from "Joker" to "Remembrance"', *Ariel*, 16:3 (July 1985), 95.
 - 10 Harry Milner, 'The Beauty of Decadence', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 1 November 1970, p. 5.
 - 11 M[ervyn] M[orris], 'Theatre of Expertise', *The Daily Gleaner*, 31 October 1970, p. 36.
 - 12 V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: André Deutsch, 1967), p. 220.
 - 13 In March 1990, Walcott was actively involved in a protest against an alleged government-backed tourism development project in the area of the Pitons, which was seen by the protesters as likely to disfigure those natural treasures of St Lucia and damage the ecological balance of the area.
 - 14 Bruce King, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 339–40.
 - 15 For an informative comparison of Walcott's two treatments of Catherine Weldon, see Robert Bensen, 'Catherine Weldon in *Omeros* and *The Ghost Dance*: Notes on Derek Walcott's Poetry and Drama', in *Verse*, 11:2 (Summer 1994), 119–25.
- 6 'HERE' AND 'ELSEWHERE', 'WORD' AND 'WORLD': 'THE
FORTUNATE TRAVELLER', 'MIDSUMMER',
'THE ARKANSAS TESTAMENT'
- 1 For the connection between Vallejo, Thursday and rain, see Derek Walcott, *Another Life: Fully Annotated*, eds. Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh, pp. 314 and 292.

- 2 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Michael J. C. Echeruo (London: Longman, 1980), p. 31.
- 3 Derek Walcott, 'Spreading Our Culture Abroad,' *The Sunday Guardian*, 8 November 1964, p. 18.
- 4 John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 17–23. See also John J. Figueroa, 'Creole in Literature: Beyond Verisimilitude: Texture and Varieties: Derek Walcott,' *Yearbook of English Studies*, 25 (1955), 156–62.
- 5 Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner, p. 55.
- 6 Unpublished audiotape of Walcott reading, University of Warwick, 4 November 1998.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), p. 177.
- 9 See Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 196: 'When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in battalions.' (Act 4, Scene 3, lines 77–8.)
- 10 R.W. Flint, 'Feeding the Hunger for Stories,' *New York Times Book Review*, 8 April 1984, p. 14.
- 11 In this regard, it is instructive to read Walcott's account of how *Midsummer* came about (CDW, 120).
- 12 The numbering runs from 'I' to 'LIV', but 'XIX' consists of two parts, and 'XLIII' of eight, which may be treated as separate poems.
- 13 Terry Eagleton, 'Plenty of Life', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 November 1984, p. 1290.
- 14 See also the first and most developed West Indian response to Froude, J.J. Thomas' *Froudacity* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889; rpt. London: New Beacon Books, 1969).
- 15 See p. 8 above.
- 16 Flint, 'Feeding the Hunger', p. 14.
- 17 Eagleton, 'Plenty of Life', p. 1290.
- 18 Lorna Goodison, *Travelling Mercies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001). p. 42.
- 19 Walcott, *Poems*, p. 24.
- 20 See also Rei Terada's essay 'Walcott and Postmodernity', in *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), pp. 213–26.
- 21 Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II*, Act II, Scene iv, line 1, in *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts I and II*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 129.
- 22 Waldemar Januszczak, 'The Longing on St Lucia', *The Guardian*, 9 July 1988.

7 NARRATIVE VARIATIONS: 'OMEROS',
'THE ODYSSEY', 'THE BOUNTY', 'TIEPOLO'S HOUND'

- 1 Derek Walcott, *Bim*, 26 (January–June 1958), 65.
- 2 Derek Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', *Southern Atlantic Quarterly*, 96:2 (Spring 1997), 240.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Among the valuable contributions to this debate, see, for example, Robert D. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's 'Omeros'* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1997); Joseph Farrell, 'Walcott's *Omeros*: The Classical Epic in a Postmodern World,' *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96:2 (Spring 1997), 247–73; Gregson Davis, "'With No Homeric Shadow": The Disavowal of Epic in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*,' *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96:2 (Spring 1997), 321–33.
- 5 Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 243.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 7 Davis, "'With No Homeric Shadow'", p. 328.
- 8 Derek Walcott, quoted by D.J.R. Bruckner, in 'The Poet Who Fused Folklore, Homer and Hemingway,' *The New York Times*, 9 October 1990, p. B2.
- 9 José Saramago, 'Erratic Odyssey: the Novel's Return Towards the Condition of Poetry,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 November 1998, p. 14.
- 10 Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 244.
- 11 Brad Leithauser, 'Ancestral Rhyme', p. 94.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 See Jahan Ramazani, 'The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction', *PMLA*, 112: 3 (May 1997), 405–17.
- 14 Noteworthy exceptions are Natalie King-Pedroso's argument that Ma Kilman and Helen are versions of Oshun, and Joyce Kessler's examination of African bird symbols in the poem. Natalie King-Pedroso, "'I-Tie-All My People Together": New World Appropriations of the Yoruba Deity Oshun in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*,' *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 15: 1 and 2 (Fall 2000), 61–94; Joyce Kessler, 'All The Horned Island's Birds: The Transformative African Symbols of Walcott's *Omeros*,' *The Arkansas Review*, 5: 1–2 (August 1996), 1–9.
- 15 Paula Burnett puts it this way: 'Walcott balances . . . the desire to return home . . . [with] the desire for rootlessness, for the freedom of the wanderer' (Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, p. 300).
- 16 Paula Burnett's full and well informed commentary on the play is instructive in its detailed comparison of the two works. See *ibid.*, pp. 281–312.

17 *Ibid.*

- 18 Walcott's Elpenor would seem to be a conflation of Homer's character and Palinurus, Aeneas' helmsman in Virgil's *Aeneid*, who, while asleep at the helm, fell overboard off the coast of Lucania. He swam ashore but was killed by the Lucanians. Aeneas visited him in the Underworld and promised him a proper burial.
- 19 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E.V. Rieu (London: Methuen, 1952), p. 351.
- 20 Seamus Heaney, 'John Clare: a Bi-centenary Lecture,' in *John Clare in Context*, eds. Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 143.
- 21 See Maya Jaggi, 'No Trouble in Paradise', *The Guardian*, 12 July 1997, 'The Week', p. 3. Walcott built his house at Becune Point, near Gros Illet, with money from his Nobel prize.
- 22 See p. 90 above.
- 23 Derek Walcott, in Jaggi, 'No Trouble in Paradise', p. 3.
- 24 See also, Jim Hannan, 'Crossing Couplets: Making Form the Matter of Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*', *New Literary History*, 33:3 (Summer 2002), 559–79.
- 25 See also, Sarah Fulford, 'Painting the Sublime in Visible Syntax: Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 33:1 (2004), 11–27.

8 HOMECOMING: 'THE PRODIGAL'

- 1 Joachim du Bellay, *Les regrets et autres oeuvres poétiques* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966), p. 98. I am grateful to Abiola Irele for suggesting the parallel between *The Prodigal* and du Bellay's sonnet.
- 2 The name of the translator is not given.
- 3 W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 217.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- 5 Derek Walcott, 'A Colonial's-Eye View of the Empire', *Tri-Quarterly*, 65 (Winter 1986), 75.

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Index

- Andersen, Hans Christian: 'The Ice Maiden' 225
- Anthony, Patrick 101, 234
- Attila 163
- Auden, W.H. 36–7, 176–7, 180
'Musée des Beaux Arts' 32
- Austen, Jane 141
- Baer, William 26
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 186
- Baudelaire, Charles 33
- Bearden, Romare 151
- Bim* 38
- Black Power 129, 138, 139
- Blake, William 26, 43
- Bligh, Captain 203, 204
- Borges, J.L. 173
- Boxill, Anthony 195
- Brathwaite, Kamau 8, 87
- Brecht, Bertolt 73
- Breslin, Paul 111
- Brodsky, Joseph 23, 28, 31, 118, 155,
171, 172–3, 175, 176, 208
'Roman Elegies' 172
- Brontë, Charlotte: *Jane Eyre* 159
- Brown, Lloyd 111
- Brown, Robert 31
- Brown, Wayne 24, 36, 105, 108
- Browne, Sir Thomas 43
Urn Burial 43
- Bruegel, Pieter 172
- Burnett, Paula 164, 240
- Byron, Lord 163
- Campbell, George: *First Poems* 35
Caribbean Voices radio programme 36
- Carpentier, Alejo: *El reino de este mundo* 61
- Césaire, Aimé 8, 19, 162
La tragédie du Roi Christophe 61
- Chamberlin, J. Edward 27
- Chant of Saints* 113, 114
- Chekhov, Anton 144
The Seagull 133
- Christian, Fletcher 204
- Ciccarelli, Sharon 19
- Clare, John 203, 204, 209
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor: 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner, The' 134
- College of the Virgin Islands 237
- Conrad, Joseph 119, 156, 186
Heart of Darkness 164
- Craven, Thomas: *Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, A 212
- Croston, Kenneth 237
- Dance, Daryl 15
- Dante 32, 89, 188, 196, 229
Inferno, The 30
- Davis, Gregson 186
- Delacroix, Eugène: *Liberty Leading the People* 179
- DeMott, Benjamin 119
- Descartes, René 177
- Donne, John 43, 108
Devotions 44
- Douglass, Frederick 151
- Dryden, John 163
- Du Bellay, Joachim: 'Heureux qui comme Ulysse' 226–7
- Duvalier, François ('Papa Doc') 103
- Eagleton, Terry 169, 172
- Edwards, Bryan 91
- Eliot, T.S. 31, 33, 34, 37, 43, 50, 89
The Waste Land 30

- Emerson, Ralph Waldo:
 'Self-Reliance' 50
 Escoffery, Gloria 116
 Executor 163
- Fanon, Frantz 83, 84
 Black Skin, White Masks 83
 Wretched of the Earth, The 83
 Figueroa, John 217
 Flint, R. W. 167, 172
 Froude, J. A. 12, 14, 49, 50, 59,
 170, 171
 The English in the West Indies 8–9, 170
 Fuller, Roy 36–7
- Gairy, Eric 103
 Garrison, William 150, 151
 Garvey, Marcus 16
 Gauguin, Paul 98, 220
 Gibbon, Edward: *History of the
 Decline and Fall of the
 Roman Empire, The* 94
 Gibbons, Rawle 234
 Giroux, Robert 89
 Glissant, Edouard: *Monsieur Toussaint* 61
 Goldsmith, Oliver 141
 Goodison, Lorna 173
 Goya, Francisco 206
 Graves, Robert 23
 Gray, Thomas: 'Elegy in a Country
 Churchyard' 132
- Haile Selassie, Emperor 125
 Hamner, Robert D. 27
 Harris, Wilson 8, 87
 Heaney, Seamus 203
 Hearne, John 217
 Hemingway, Ernest 6, 187
 Hirsch, Edward 25, 37
 Homer 32, 89, 112, 121, 141, 158,
 159, 186, 187, 188, 195, 196, 199, 200,
 201, 229
 Iliad, The 158, 159, 189, 195
 Odyssey, The 2, 30, 112, 120, 135, 158, 195,
 196, 197–9, 200, 202
- Ismond, Patricia 114, 117, 134
- Jaggi, Maya 208
 Januszcak, Waldemar 182
 Johnson, Cheryl 31
 Johnson, Samuel 56
- Joyce, James 30, 32, 111, 192, 196
 *Portrait of the Artist as a Young
 Man* 30, 89
 Joyce, Nora 224
 Juvenal 163
- Keith, Arthur 88, 94
 Kessler, Joyce 240
 King, Bruce: *Derek Walcott: A
 Caribbean Life* 143
 King-Pedroso, Natalie 240
 Kipling, Rudyard 186
 Kurosawa, Akira: *Rashomon* 73
Kyk-over-al 16
- Lamming, George 8
 In the Castle of My Skin 11
 Langland, William 168
 Piers Plowman 112
 Lawrence, Jacob 151
 Leithauser, Brad 24, 188
 Lennard, John 234
 Lion 163
 Long, Edward 14
 Lorca, Garcia 206
 Lord Blakie 164
 Lord Kitchener 163, 164
 Lord Melody 164
 Lowell, Robert 25
- MacDermot, Galt 121, 126, 237, 238
 Machado, Antonio 206
 MacLeish, Archibald: 'Ars Poetica' 39
 MacNeice, Louis 37
 Madariaga, Salvador de 15
 Maestro 163
Magnificent Seven, The 133
 Malraux, André 177
 Man's Fate 177
 Mandelstam, Osip 118
 Manley, Michael 114, 217
 Marley, Robert (Bob) 179
 Marlowe, Christopher 26, 62, 180
 Marquez, Gabriel García: *The Autumn
 of the Patriarch* 118
 Martial 163
 Mauriac, François 177
 Maurois, André 177
 Mazzocco, Robert 30
 Mighty Shadow, The 133
 Mighty Sparrow, The 163
 'Village Ram' 122

- Mighty Spoiler, The (Theophilus Phillip) 162
 'Bedbug' 163
 Miller, Arthur: *Death of a Salesman* 132
 Milton, John 26, 43, 62, 132
 Montenegro, David 3, 25, 29
 Montgomery, General Bernard 189
 Morris, Mervyn 236
- Nabokov, Vladimir: *Gift, The* 99
 Naipaul, V.S. 9, 10, 49, 50, 59, 139, 170
 Middle Passage, The 8, 9, 170
 Noh theatre 73
- Odets, Clifford 27
 Okpewho, Isidore 18
 Olaniyan, Tejumola 84, 230
 Ovid 160, 161
- Pascal, Roy 90, 91, 94
 Pasternak, Boris: *Safe Conduct* 89
 Perse, St John 19
 Pinter, Harold 27
 Pippin, Horace 151
 Pissarro, Camille 210–11, 211–12, 213–15, 216, 217, 218, 220–1
 Pope, Alexander 163
 Pound, Ezra 30, 31, 89
 Presson, Rebekah 3
 Proust, Marcel: *Remembrance of Things Past* 89
- Questel, Victor D. 4
 Quevedo, Raymond (*see also* Attila) 163
- Racine 144
Ramayana, The 2, 70
 Ramazani, Jahan 189
Ramleela, The 8, 12
 Rastafarians 16, 125–7, 221
 Rembrandt: *Syndics of the Drapers' Guild, The* 225
 Rhys, Jean: *Wide Sargasso Sea* 159
 Rimbaud, Arthur 90
 Rochester, Earl of 163–4
 Rohlehr, Gordon 47
 Rowell, Charles H. 19
 Royal Shakespeare Company, The 226
- Sartre, Jean-Paul 83, 84
 Schoenberger, Nancy 3
 Scott, Dennis 29, 46
 Seferis, George 158
 Senghor, Leopold 16
 Seymour, A. J. 16
 Shakespeare, William 43, 62, 141, 144, 145
 Antony and Cleopatra 118, 144, 145
 Hamlet 61, 142, 167
 King Lear 146
 Othello 4
 Sherlock, Philip 115, 237
 Simmons, Harold (Harry) 32, 35, 40, 55, 94, 96, 98, 99–100, 180, 211
 Simon, Paul 237
 Sitting Bull 147–8, 150
 Sjöberg, Leif 30
 Sophocles: *Oedipus* 4
 Spender, Stephen 35, 37
 St Omer, Dunstan 96, 98, 100, 101–2
 Stone, Judy 128
 Swanzy, Henry 24
 Swift, Jonathan 163
 Synge, J. M. 73
- Telléz, Gabriel (*see* Tirso de Molina) 123
 Terada, Rei 161
 Thieme, John 89, 105
 Thomas, Dylan 37
 Tiepolo, Giovanni 210, 213, 218, 219, 221
 Tiger 163
 Tirso de Molina 121, 123
 El Burlador de Sevilla 121, 122
 Trinidad Theatre Workshop 80, 120, 121, 124
 Trollope, Anthony 170, 171
 West Indies and the Spanish Main, The 170
- University College of the West Indies 36, 80, 97
 University of the West Indies 80
- Vallejo, César 155
 Van Gogh, Vincent 15
 Veronese, Paolo 210, 218, 221
 Feast in the House of Levi, The 213
 Virgil 32, 156
 Aeneid 156
- Walcott, Alix 203
 Walcott, Derek
 amnesia 9–10
 autobiography 5–7, 91–2

Walcott, Derek (*cont.*)

- calypso 4, 27, 64, 80, 122, 133, 142
- class 1, 18–20
- Crusoe, Robinson 12, 13, 48, 50, 53, 88, 132, 133–6
- history, Caribbean history 1, 4, 7–14, 42–3, 49–51, 59–60, 62, 98–9, 111, 113, 119, 1253 897, 190, 195, 218–19
- language 1, 20–6, 130, 134, 180–1, 206
- literary influence and originality 30–1
- Negritude 18
- nothing, creating something out of 8–9, 49–50
- plays:
 - Beef, No Chicken* 120, 139–142
 - Branch of the Blue Nile, A* 10, 24, 124, 142–7
 - Capeman, The* 237–8
 - Charlatan, The* 120
 - Dream on Monkey Mountain* 2, 15, 16, 20, 24, 25, 57, 58, 59, 60, 69, 71, 72, 80, 83–7, 104, 120, 121, 135, 138, 170, 171
 - Dream on Monkey Mountain & Other Plays* 3, 57
 - Drums and Colours* 10, 57, 59, 61, 62–5, 66, 67, 68, 71, 122
 - Franklin* 39, 58, 70, 80–3, 120, 169, 189, 198
 - Ghost Dance, The* 147–50, 189, 192
 - Haitian Earth, The* 57, 59, 62, 65–7, 76
 - Haitian Trilogy, The* 57
 - Henri Christophe* 10, 57, 59, 61–2, 64, 66, 67, 68
 - In A Fine Castle* 137
 - Ione* 68, 71–2
 - Joker of Seville, The* 24, 25, 64, 71, 120, 124, 126, 201
 - 'Joker of Seville' and 'O Babylon!', 'The'* 121
 - Last Carnival, The* 20, 136–9, 198
 - Malcochon* 25, 59, 72–5, 76
 - O Babylon!* 124–7, 138
 - Odyssey: a Stage Version, The* 24, 65, 112, 135, 185, 196–202, 217, 227
 - Pantomime* 24, 120, 132–6, 143
 - Remembrance* 120, 124, 128–32, 136, 138, 141
 - 'Remembrance' and 'Pantomime'* 128
 - Sea at Dauphin, The* 59, 68–70, 73, 80, 83
 - Steel* 238
 - Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 10, 24, 59, 66, 68, 71, 72, 75–80, 103, 105, 120, 121, 122, 138, 180

Walker 18, 150–2

'Walker' and 'The Ghost Dance' 147

Wine of the Country, The 128

poems:

'Adam's Song' 104, 105, 123

'Air' 49

'Allegre' 34, 90

'Almond Trees, The' 10, 14, 21, 49, 51, 353 639, 191

Another Life 5, 6, 9, 15, 30, 31, 34, 35,

38, 40, 41, 52, 55, 58, 59, 70, 76, 81, 88,

89–100, 101, 103, 104, 112, 119, 124, 130,

140, 154, 156, 173, 185, 187, 189, 193, 196,

203, 204, 211, 212, 213, 216, 218, 225,

226, 227, 228

'Archipelagoes' 158

Arkansas Testament, The 54, 153,

155, 160, 175–4, 206

'Arkansas Testament, The' 181–3

'At Last' 170

'Berceuse' 176

'Blues' 53

Bounty, The 5, 41, 76, 186, 203–9, 235

'Bounty, The' 41, 203, 204

'Bright Field, The' 107–8, 166, 182

'Brother, The' 103, 104

'Call for Breakers and Builders' 35

'Cantina Music' 161

'Careful Passion, A' 42

Castaway, The 45, 56, 88, 147

'Choc Bay' 41, 42

'Cloud, The' 76, 104, 105, 119, 123, 235

'Commune' 104

'Country Club Romance' 36

'Cracked Playground, The' 41

'Crusoe's Island' 7, 41, 47, 48, 53

'Crusoe's Journal' 48, 50, 53, 54

'Cul de Sac Valley' 180, 181, 206

'Dread Song' 103, 127

'Dream, The' 127

'Early Pompeian' 159–60, 184

'Egypt, Tobago' 118

'Elegy' 32, 40

'Elsewhere' 178

'Endings' 107

'En Mi-Carême' 42

Epitaph for the Young 29, 30, 31–5,

112, 196

'Eulogy to W.H. Auden' 41, 176, 177

'Europa' 158

'Exile' 54

'Far Cry from Africa, A' 44, 158

- 'Flock, The' 53
 'For Adrian' 183, 184
 'Forest of Europe' 41, 118, 147
Fortunate Traveller, The 20, 32, 153,
 154–66, 183, 184, 224
 'Fortunate Traveller, The' 156
 'French Colonial: Vers de Société' 177
 'From This Far' 158
 'Glory Trumpeter, The' 45, 53
 'Greece' 159
 'Gros-Ilet' 180
Gulf, The 45, 317, 321, 47, 52, 56, 88
 'Gulf, The' 46, 53
 'Harbour, The' 40, 173
 'Harvest, The' 107
 'Hic Jacet' 55
 'Homage to Edward Thomas' 46, 53
 'Homecoming' 206
 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye' 54, 95
 'Hotel Normandie Pool, The' 160–1
 'Hurucan' 159
In A Green Night 7, 30, 38–45, 112
 'In My Eighteenth Year' 32
 'Islands' 42
 'Italian Eclogues' 205, 208
 'Jean Rhys' 159
 'Koenig of the River' 6, 119
 'Landfall, Grenada' 53
 'Latin Primer, A' 181
 'Laventille' 13, 20, 48–9, 158, 170
 'Lesson for This Sunday, A' 44
 'Letter from Brooklyn, A' 40–1, 99
 'Letter to a Sailor, A' 35
 'Liberator, The' 161
 'Light of the World, The' 19, 179–80, 190
 'Lighthouse, The' 179
 'Lines in New England' 147
 'Man Who Loved Islands, The' 161–2
 'Map of the Antilles, A' 42
 'Map of Europe, A' 46
 'Map of the New World' 158
 'Margaret Verlieu Dies' 36
 'Mass Man' 3, 10–11, 195
 'Menelaus' 183
Midsummer 6, 25, 153, 155, 157, 166–75,
 208, 209
 'Missing the Sea' 48
 'Montego Bay – Travelogue 11' 35
 'Muse of History at Rampanalgas, The' 98
 'Natural History' 105
 'Nearing Forty' 24, 47, 53, 56
 'New World' 105
 'North and South' 154, 156–7
 'Oceano Nox' 180
 'Old New England' 154–5
Omeros 5, 18, 24, 28, 31, 59, 112, 149, 153,
 158, 159, 952 981, 185, 186–95, 196, 199,
 200, 203, 207, 215, 223
 'Over Colorado' 147
 'Parades, Parades' 103
 'Parang' 206
 'Pays Natal' 42
 'Piano Practice' 155–6
Poems 35–38
 'Port of Spain' 161
 'Prelude' 40
 'Preparing for Exile' 118
Prodigal, The 18, 31, 112, 185, 206,
 215, 222–9
 'Propertius Quartet, A' 183
 'Return to D'Ennery, Rain' 42,
 54, 56, 101, 229
 'Roots' 70
 'Ruins of a Great House' 43–4, 58,
 107–8, 156
 'Saddhu of Couva, The' 70, 83, 140
 'Sainte Lucie' 34, 100–2, 105, 174, 180, 206
 'Santa Cruz Quartet, A' 208
 'Schooner *Flight*, The' 7, 13, 33, 38, 88,
 109–13, 115, 138, 162, 178, 185, 196
 'Sea Change, A' 157
 'Sea-Chantey, A' 41–2
Sea Grapes 88, 100–8, 111, 118, 119, 124, 127,
 147, 166, 173, 174, 203, 206, 223
 'Sea Grapes' 196
 'Sea Is History, The' 119, 169
 'Season of Phantasmal Peace, The' 166
Selected Poems 30
Selected Poetry 24
 'Signs' 207, 208
 'Sisters of Saint Joseph, The' 41
 'Six Fictions' 207–8
 'Spain' 205, 208
 'Spoiler's Return, The' 38, 162–4
Star-Apple Kingdom, The 88, 109–19,
 124, 140, 147, 153
 'Star-Apple Kingdom, The' 88, 109,
 113–18, 217
 'Steersman, My Brother' 41
 'Store Bay' 160
 'Streams' 155, 183
 'Summer Elegies' 183
 'Swamp, The' 47
 'Tales of the Islands' 38–40, 42, 112, 185

Walcott, Derek (*cont.*)

Tiepolo's Hound 14, 18, 31, 112, 153,

925 984, 185, 209–21, 222, 223

'To A Painter in England' 40

'To the Hotel Saint Antoine' 55

'To Return to the Trees' 107, 128, 203

'Train, The' 52

'Travelogue' 35

'Upstate' 155

'Verandah' 52, 81

'Vigil in the Desert' 104

'Virgins, The' 103, 156

'Wales' 155, 183

'Wedding of An Actress, The' 41

'Whale His Bulwark, The' 48

'Whelk Gatherers, The' 180

'White Magic' 180

'Winding Up' 203

'Winter Lamps' 183–4

25 *Poems* 29, 30, 32, 34, 42

prose:

'Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?

The' 9, 88

'Figure of Crusoe, The' 12, 48

'His Is the Pivotal One About Race' 16

'Leaving School' 92

'Meanings' 60

'Muse of History, The' 9, 16, 17, 22,

51, 52, 89, 91, 98, 104, 105

'Necessity of Negritude' 16

Nobel lecture, The 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 13,

14, 18, 21, 28, 70, 89

'On Choosing Port of Spain' 106

'What the Twilight Says' 3, 8, 13, 15, 16,

90, 104, 127, 145

'White Devil, The' 78

race 1, 14–18, 35–6, 62, 170–1

role-playing 130, 132, 139, 142

Walcott, Roderick 226

Watteau, Antoine 137, 139

'Embarkation to Cythera' 136, 142

Weekes, Travis 235

Weldon, Catherine 148–50, 189

Wesley, John 180

White, J. P. 4, 33, 46, 119, 223

Whitman, Walt 30

Whittier, J. G.: 'Snow-Bound' 225

Wieland, James 161

Williams, Denis 16

Other Leopards 16

Williams, Eric 104

Wilmot, John (*see* Rochester, Earl of)

Wordsworth, William: *The Prelude* 89

Wright, James 168

Yeats, W.B. 205

'Byzantium' 229

'Sailing to Byzantium' 228